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THE
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HORÆ HOMILETICÆ:

OR

DISCOURSES

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AND FORMING A COMMENTARY

UPON EVERY BOOK OF

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT;

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED,

AN IMPROVED EDITION OF A TRANSLATION OF

CLAUDE'S ESSAY ON THE COMPOSITION OF A SERMON.

IN TWENTY-ONE VOLUMES.

BY THE REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M.A.

SENIOR FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

VOL. XIX.

2 TIMOTHY TO HEBREWS.

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2 TIMOTHY.

MMCCXL.

THE SPIRIT OF VITAL CHRISTIANITY.

2 Tim. i. 7. *God hath not given to us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

THE real character of Christianity, as infused into the soul of the believer, and exhibited in his life, is by no means generally understood. It forms a man of energy; but of energy combined with suavity, and regulated with discretion. In whomsoever it exists, it operates like a new creation: it changes, to a very considerable extent, the views, the dispositions, the habits of the soul, so as gradually to "transform a man into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness." It does not, indeed, so assimilate men, that they shall be in *all* things the same: there will still remain in every man so much of his original cast, as will occasion an endless diversity in the characteristic features of different saints. Not all the grace that God ever bestowed would produce a perfect identity of character between Peter and John: but the principles which divine grace instils into the soul are the same in every age and every place: and of all its subjects it may be said, "God has given to us, not a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

With a view to open and illustrate these gracious words, I will shew,

I. The spirit which God infuses into the souls of his people—

It is “not a spirit of fear”—

[“Fear” is discarded from the soul that is truly given up to God. There may remain, indeed, what I may call a constitutional fear; (some persons, whose piety cannot be doubted, have a strange and unaccountable fear of this or that animal^a;) and no depth of religious principle will prevent its operation; for its seat is in the imagination, and not in the heart: but the fear of man, which has so great an ascendant over the carnal mind, will be dismissed; being subjected to, and, if I may so express myself, swallowed up by, the fear of God^b— — —]

It is a spirit “of power”—

[A holy resolution will be formed to serve the Lord, and “to follow him fully.” Whatever means be used to deter a child of God from his purpose, he will hold on his way. Father, mother, brother, sister, houses, lands, yea, and life itself, are regarded by him as of no account, in comparison with his duty to God: he “*hates* them all” in comparison of his God and Saviour^c: as for sin, it is a foe which he pursues with unrelenting animosity, determined, through grace, that not one lust shall continue in him unmortified and unsubdued. His besetting sin, whatever it may be, is pursued by him with more than ordinary vigilance, if by any means he may prevail to bring it into subjection, and to destroy it utterly^d. And he does advance from victory to victory; finding that, however weak he be in himself, “through the strength communicated to him from above, he can do all things^e.”]

This power, however, is blended with a spirit “of love”—

[The energy which we have just spoken of has somewhat of an unamiable aspect; and would be unamiable in the highest degree, if it were not tempered with love. To resist all authority of parents, and the solicitations of most endeared relatives, bears with it an aspect of culpable self-will, and of deplorable self-conceit. The believer, therefore, must be particularly on his guard to cut off all occasion for such misapprehensions. His whole spirit must savour of love. He must shew, that whatever he does, he does from absolute necessity: and that, as far as love can operate in conformity to God’s will, no child of man shall exceed him in the cultivation of it.

^a A toad, for instance, or a mouse, or some insect.

^b Luke xii. 4, 5.

^c Luke xiv. 26.

^d Heb. xiii. 1.

^e Phil. iv. 13.

Even towards his persecutors *this* must be in active and continual exercise; his fixed determination being, “not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good.”]

Yet, not even love must be left to operate but under the direction of “a sound mind”—

[Enthusiasm is no part of true religion: it is rather in decided opposition to it; and is always the offspring of an ill-regulated mind. True religion is wisdom; and God, when infusing it into the soul, gives us “sound wisdom” and discretion^g. A man under the influence of divine grace will pause before he acts; and will weigh, as in a balance, the claims of duty, as they may be affected by times and circumstances. He will carefully distinguish between things necessary, and things of only subordinate importance. He will attend to the time and manner of doing what he judges to be necessary; so as to strip it of all needless offence, and to “cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against him.” Both in the world and in the Church, he will be anxious so to demean himself, that all who behold him shall acknowledge that God is with him of a truth^h. He will give no needless offence in any thing; but will labour, with David, to “behave himself wisely in a perfect wayⁱ.”]

But, that we may the better appreciate his spirit, we will mark,

II. Its peculiar importance, in order to a due discharge of the ministerial office—

The words before us were addressed more immediately to Timothy, a young and pious minister: and they deserve the very special attention of all who either are, or hereafter may be, engaged in the ministerial office.

In such must be found no spirit “of fear”—

[A minister is a standard-bearer: and if *he* faint, what must be expected of others? He must go with his life in his hand: he must “set his face as a flint” against the whole world^k. No confederacies, whether of men or devils, must appal him^l. His spirit must be that which is described by the prophet: “Truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord; and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin^m.” And, in the midst

^g Rom. xii. 21.

^g Prov. ii. 7.

^h 1 Cor. x. 32, 33.

ⁱ Ps. ci. 2.

^k Isai. l. 7.

^l Jer. i. 17. and Ezek. ii. 6, 7.

^m Mic. iii. 8.

of all the afflictions that can come upon him, he must say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may but finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God"."]

But in them must be conspicuous a spirit "of power"—

[They have more difficulties to encounter than others. They stand in the forefront of the battle: and they must be examples, not to the world only, but to the whole Church of God. To Timothy, whilst quite a youth, it was said, "Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity^o." If a minister be overcome of any evil, the injury done to the Church of God is incalculable. The whole ungodly world will take occasion from it to exult over him, and to "blaspheme the very name of God himself^p:" yea, they will harden themselves in their own iniquities, and impute to the Gospel itself the evils which they see in him^q. He must "be steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; for then only shall his labour not be in vain in the Lord^r."]

In them too, more especially, must be a spirit "of love"—

[Nothing but a love to immortal souls can reconcile them to all the labours and difficulties which they have to sustain. They should therefore "have compassion on them that are ignorant and out of the way^s:" they should be able to "call God to witness that they have great heaviness and continual sorrow in their hearts" for their perishing fellow-creatures^t: and they should be ready to welcome even death itself, if it may but be subservient to the spiritual welfare of their brethren^u. At the same time, their whole deportment should be regulated by this benign principle. Every thing they do should proceed from it; every thing which they suffer should call it into exercise: and their whole walk should be, like that of their Divine Master, in a spirit of love.]

But, in all their diversified circumstances, they must shew themselves under the influence of "a sound mind"—

[In no situation is wisdom so requisite, as in the discharge of the ministerial office: for, as the circumstances of the

ⁿ Acts xx. 24.

^o 1 Tim. iv. 12.

^p Rom. ii. 24.

^q 2 Pet. ii. 2.

^r 1 Cor. xv. 58.

^s Heb. v. 2.

^t Rom. ix. 1, 2.

^u Phil. ii. 17, 18.

minister are more arduous, and his trials more diversified, than those of others, so a want of judgment in him is more deeply felt than in any other person; because the prejudices of many are strengthened by it, and the souls of many are hardened in their sins. A minister, therefore, must be particularly attentive to this point. He must have a well-regulated mind. His views, both of truth and duty, must be clear: his judgment, in relation to every thing, must be accurately and wisely formed. He must be freed from every bias that may influence his mind, and from every lust which may blind his eyes. He must be cool, considerate, prayerful: he must feel his entire dependence on God to guide him aright: and must cry to him for that "wisdom, which is profitable to direct." And, where God has really fitted a man for the ministry, there will be, though in different degrees, "a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and of might, a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; all concurring to make him quick of understanding in the fear of the Lord^x."

APPLICATION—

1. To you, then, who have not received this spirit, I would say, "Seek it of the Lord"—

[It is the gift of God: it cannot proceed from man: it may come to us *through* man; but it is *from* God alone, even from Him, "from whom cometh every good and perfect gift^y." Whether we be ministers or private Christians, this spirit is indispensable to our eternal welfare. No man can be saved without it. "The *fearful*" shall go into the lake of fire, as certainly as "whoremongers or murderers^z:" the man who for *want of strength* draws back, "draws back unto perdition^a:" the person *destitute of love* is no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal^b:" and the man *devoid of wisdom* will perish^c. I say then, seek this spirit; "so shall you have good understanding, in the sight both of God and man^d."

It is remarkable, that, when St. Paul is instructing Titus how to speak to the cases of both old people and young, he specifies many things which he would have him insist upon with old men and old women, and with young women also: but with young men, every thing that was essential was comprehended in one single point; "Exhort young men to be sober-minded^e." On this, therefore, I would particularly insist; because with sobriety of mind every grace will flourish; but without it, no man can ever walk worthy of the Gospel, or adorn, as he ought, the doctrine of God our Saviour.]

^x Isai. xi. 2, 3.

^y Jam. i. 17.

^z Rev. xxi. 8.

^a Heb. x. 39.

^b 1 Cor. xiii. 1.

^c Prov. xxix. 10.

^d Prov. iii. 4.

^e Tit. ii. 6.

2. To those who have received it, I would say, "Stir it up within you"—

This was the direction given to Timothy: "Stir up the gift of God that is in thee;" that is, stir it up, as you would a fire which is in a languishing condition^f. The fire, which burned upon the altar, came down, as you well know, from heaven; but it was to be kept alive by the care of man. So must the fire that is kindled in us be ever kept burning on the altar of our hearts: we must "stir it up," by reading, meditation, and prayer: and the very opposition which is made to the Gospel must call forth in us the greater energy in its defence. Paul was now imprisoned for the Gospel sake. This might be a source of alarm to Timothy, and induce him to draw back from that measure of activity and zeal which might bring down similar vengeance upon his head. But the Apostle says to him, "Be not ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, nor of me his prisoner; but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel, according to the power of God^g." So say I to you. Let "none of you be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ;" but rather account it an honour if you are called to bear a measure of those afflictions which are allotted to the followers of the Lamb. They will try your graces: they will also tend to quicken them, and make them burn with redoubled brightness. Let growth in grace, then, be henceforth your great concern; and, whatever will conduce to that end, do it with diligence, or welcome it with delight.]

^f ἀναζωπυρεῖν, ver. 6.

^g ver. 8.

MMCCXLI.

EFFECTUAL CALLING.

2 Tim. i. 9. *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*

THE deepest truths of our religion were familiar to the mind of the Apostle Paul. He introduced them, on all occasions, as the most forcible motives to obedience^a. Amongst us, their practical efficacy is denied, and their importance questioned. The very maintaining of them is not unfrequently deemed

^a The consideration of God's electing love is here urged as a motive to induce Timothy to constancy and perseverance in the path of duty.

a crime; but we must not conceal the truth, because some reprobate it as error. We will state it cautiously; and it will commend itself to all. In the text, we have ample instruction in relation to *the Christian's calling*: we see,

I. The nature of it—

There is an outward call of the Gospel, which is resisted by many; but that of which the text speaks, is inward and effectual—

It is a call,

1. To salvation as the end—

[If it were only, as many think, a call to outward privileges, it still would establish God's right to bestow his blessings on whomsoever he will^b. But the Scriptures represent it as a call to the adoption of children^c, to eternal life^d, to everlasting salvation^e. The connexion between salvation and the call, is, as in the text, uniform and inseparable^f.]

2. To holiness as the way—

[If holiness were not included in the call, the doctrine of election would certainly be open to insurmountable objections: but holiness is that to which we are immediately and distinctly called^g. It is required of us, not only in general^h, but in this particular viewⁱ. It is declared to have been particularly in the mind and intention of God, in our predestination^k, election^l, vocation^m, and in the whole work of his grace upon our heartsⁿ. Our perseverance also in good works was equally in his contemplation^o. When our acceptance and salvation are most distinctly spoken of as the end, holiness is carefully stated as the medium through which we are to attain them^p.]

The Christian's calling is further to be considered, in reference to,

II. The grounds of it—

^b If God has a right to confer the means of salvation on some and not on others, he has a right to confer salvation itself. If the one would be unjust, so must the other be; and if the one be admitted, so must also the other.

^c Eph. i. 5.

^d Acts xiii. 48.

^e 1 Thess. v. 9.

^f Rom. viii. 30.

^g 1 Thess. iv. 7. Hence it is denominated in the text, "an holy calling."

^h Heb. xii. 14.

ⁱ 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

^k Rom. viii. 29.

^l Eph. i. 4.

^m 2 Pet. i. 3.

ⁿ Eph. ii. 10.

^o John xv. 16.

^p 1 Pet. i. 2. 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.

Nothing can be more plain than the Apostle's statement: he tells us, both *negatively*, what our calling does not arise from; and *positively*, what it does:

1. It is not founded on our works—

[It cannot be founded on any good works *already done*; for we never had done, or could do any, till we were called by grace. It could not be founded on good works *foreseen*: for they were to be the fruits of our calling, and therefore could not be the ground or occasion of it. Had our works, whether done or foreseen, been the proper ground of our calling, we should have had a ground of boasting before God. Hence God has repeatedly and expressly declared, that they never operated in any respect or degree as inducements with him to confer upon us his converting grace^a.]

2. It is founded solely on his purpose and grace—

[God formed his purposes from all eternity^r; and agreeably to them he acts^s. In consequence of them we were given to Christ, as his purchased possession^t; and a promise of life was given to us in him, and for his sake^u. It was in conformity to them that the Jews were made God's peculiar people^x; and in conformity to them we Gentiles also are called to a participation of his favour^v.]

From hence we shall take occasion to answer some important QUESTIONS:

1. How shall I know whether I have been effectually called?

[It cannot be determined by any dreams, or visions, or fanciful experiences. It can be known only by the fruits which we produce^z.]

2. What have I to do on the supposition I have been called?

[You are not at liberty to indulge supineness, as though you were sure of heaven at all events. You should exceed all others in holiness, as much as you profess to surpass them in your prospects. You should walk worthy of the favours conferred upon you^a, and of the Benefactor who conferred them^b.]

^a Rom. xi. 5, 6. Eph. ii. 9. Tit. iii. 5. ^r Acts xv. 18.

^s Eph. i. 11. ^t John xvii. 6. with Eph. i. 4.

^u Tit. i. 2. ^x Deut. vii. 6—8. ^y Rom. ix. 11, 16.

^z 1 Thess. i. 4—10. St. Paul judged by the change wrought in the life and conversation of his converts.

^a Eph. iv. 1. ^b 1 Thess. ii. 12.

3. What privileges do I enjoy as one of God's elect?

[Survey the wheels of a watch, and see how, in all their complicated motions, they accomplish one important end. Thus does all the machinery of the universe, whether more or less connected with men or devils, move in reference to your present and eternal good. Of this you may be assured; and it may well endear to you the doctrines in the text^c.]

^c Rom. viii. 28.

MMCCXLII.

DEATH ABOLISHED, AND LIFE REVEALED.

2 Tim. i. 10. *Who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.*

TO the free and sovereign grace of God must all our blessings be traced. Nothing did we ever merit at his hands, or can we ever merit, but wrath and indignation. From all eternity did God ordain to give us whatever he has bestowed. The gift of a Saviour was the fruit of his eternal love; as was also the gift of salvation by him. Both the one and the other are the fruit of his eternal counsels: and the appearing of Jesus Christ, as the author of these blessings, was, not the *cause*, but the *result* and *evidence*, of purposes already formed, even of "purposes which from all eternity he had purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord^a."

But, not to insist on this, I would call your attention simply to the *fruits* of God's purpose; and shew you what, in consequence of his eternal counsels, the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. I will shew,

I. What he has done for us in his own person—

Death had been introduced by sin; and it reigned over the whole human race^b. In the curse denounced against transgression, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," both the body and the soul were alike consigned to death. But from this

^a ver. 9, 10.

^b Rom. v. 12, 17. 1 Cor. xv. 22.

curse the Lord Jesus Christ has delivered us. "He has abolished death,"

1. From the soul—

[The soul, by reason of transgression, was despoiled of all spiritual life, and was doomed to everlasting death. But the Lord Jesus Christ, by "becoming a curse for us^c," has so cancelled our guilt, that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus^d." His death has been a sufficient "propitiation for the sins of the whole world^e" — — — and "all who believe in him are justified from all things^f" — — —

By his Holy Spirit, too, the same Divine Saviour removes spiritual death from our souls. He infuses into us a principle of life, whereby we are enabled to live unto our God in righteousness and true holiness. Previous to the implantation of this principle in our souls, we have no more activity in spiritual exercises than a dead body has of sense and motion. But, when raised by him, every sense receives a spiritual power and direction. We see, and hear, and taste, and feel, and savour the things of the Spirit — — — and "walk from thenceforth in newness of life" — — —]

2. From the body—

[True it is, that "the body is still subjected to death^g;" as it is said, "It is appointed unto men once to die^h." But to those who believe in Christ, the nature and character of death are changed. It is not so properly *death* as *sleep*: "Our friend Lazarus sleepethⁱ." "Stephen," in martyrdom, "fell asleep^k." And all the saints, instead of dying, merely fall "asleep in Jesus^l." Hence we find the saints triumphing over it as a vanquished enemy^m;" yea, and numbering it amongst their richest treasures: "All things are yours, whether life or deathⁿ."

But, allowing it a short and momentary triumph, it will at last be totally "abolished." For in the last day, all that are in the graves shall come forth, every one possessing his own proper body: for "what has been sown in corruption and weakness and dishonour, shall be raised in incorruption and power and glory;" and "this mortal shall put on immortality^o." We see in our Lord Jesus Christ both a pattern and a pledge of our own resurrection: for "our vile bodies shall be fashioned like unto his glorious body^p," and be partakers with the soul in all the glory and felicity of heaven — — —]

^c Gal. iii. 13.

^d Rom. viii. 1.

^e 1 John ii. 2.

^f Acts xiii. 39.

^g Rom. viii. 10.

^h Heb. ix. 27.

ⁱ John xi. 11—13.

^k Acts vii. 60.

^l 1 Thess. iv. 14.

^m 1 Cor. xv. 55—57.

ⁿ 1 Cor. iii. 22.

^o 1 Cor. xv. 42, 43, 52, 53.

^p Phil. iii. 21.

But let us further view,

II. What he has done for us through the instrumentality of his word—

“He has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.”

These were not known to the heathen world. As for the resurrection of the body, it was derided by them, as a vain and foolish imagination: “What will this babbler say?” And, though some of the wiser philosophers entertained some faint conceptions about the immortality of the soul, it was in their minds a matter of surmise or of opinion only, and not of knowledge: it was never a fixed and operative principle in the minds of any, except the Jews; and even in their minds its operation was but very rare and partial. But the Lord Jesus Christ “brought life and immortality to light,”

1. As a matter of undoubted certainty—

[Through the whole of his ministry, he inculcated as of primary and indispensable importance, a regard to eternal life, both of body and soul^a — — —]

2. As the portion and inheritance of all his people—

[Though he declared that an eternal state awaited all, he made a broad distinction between his believing people and others. To the impenitent and unbelieving it would be a state of inconceivable misery; but to the obedient, a state of inconceivable and endless bliss: “The hour is coming,” says he, “in the which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto a resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, to a resurrection of damnation^r.” Indeed, he sets before us the whole process of the day of judgment, and the doom that shall be assigned to all, according to their respective characters; “the wicked going away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal^s.”]

3. As equally deserving the attention of every child of man—

^a Mark ix. 43—48. Matt. x. 28. ^r John v. 28, 29.

^s Matt. xxv. 31—46.

[How merciful is the warning which he has given to all to "enter in at the strait gate, and to walk in the narrow way!" Surely the thought of an eternal existence, either in happiness or misery, should operate upon all; and, if duly contemplated, it will operate on all, to deter them from evil, and to stimulate them in the path of duty. It is impossible for one who cordially embraces this sentiment not to set himself in earnest to secure the happiness provided for him in the Gospel.]

SEE then, brethren,

1. How highly you are privileged above the heathen—

[There is not a child amongst us, that is not wiser in this respect than all the philosophers of Greece and Rome — — — But what if we do not improve our knowledge? Shall not the heathen rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us? Yes, verily: "the people of Tyre and Sidon, yea, of Sodom and Gomorrha, will find it more tolerable for them in the day of judgment than we," if we do not avail ourselves of the light afforded us, to "flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life."]

2. What obligations we owe to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—

[To Him we owe both the light that has discovered these things, and the salvation that renders this discovery so delightful. To what purpose would the eternity of rewards and punishments be made known to us, if a way to avoid the one, and obtain the other, had not been revealed? It would have only been to "torment us before our time." In truth, there are none more miserable than they, who, being assured of the immortality of the soul, are ignorant of the way in which they may obtain acceptance with God. Glad would they be, if there were no future judgment. Glad would they be, if, when the time of their departure from the body arrives, they could be annihilated altogether. What is it that makes the very mention of death so painful to the generality of men? It is the dread of an hereafter, which offers to their view no prospect but of "wrath and fiery indignation to consume them." But to you who believe in Christ, and look to him for the remission of your sins, all this gloom has passed away, and "glory and honour and immortality" present themselves to your view as your assured portion! O! bless that adorable Saviour, who by his own death has abolished death, and by his own ascension to glory has shewn to you the felicity that

^t Matt. vii. 13, 14.

awaits you. Only hold fast your confidence firm unto the end, and his crown shall be your crown, his kingdom your kingdom, his glory your glory, for ever and ever.]

MMCCXLIII.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD A SOURCE OF CONSOLATION.

2 Tim. i. 12. *I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*

MAN is born to trouble: and it is of the greatest importance to him that he should know where to turn his eyes in the day of adversity. The Gospel directs us to a reconciled God in Christ Jesus, who has engaged to be our support and comfort under every distress. The Christian has many trials peculiar to himself: but the Gospel is fully adequate to his necessities. Its power to support him may be seen in the passage before us. St. Paul is exhorting Timothy to steadfastness in the cause of Christ^a: and, for his encouragement, he tells him what was the ground of his own consolations under the heavy afflictions which he was now enduring for the sake of Christ. He tells him, that, notwithstanding he was immured in a dungeon, and in daily expectation of a violent and cruel death, he was neither "ashamed" nor afraid: for that he had a firm persuasion of God's ability to keep him; and that persuasion afforded him ample support.

To illustrate the text, we may observe,

I. The Christian commits his soul to God—

The Apostle doubtless committed unto God the concerns of the Church: but it is rather of his soul that he is speaking in the words before us, because it was *that* which alone could be in danger at the day of judgment. In like manner,

Every Christian commits his soul to God—

^a ver. 8.

[We know what it is to commit a large sum of money to the care of a banker: and from thence we may attain a just notion of the Christian's conduct. He has a soul which is of more value than the whole world: and he feels great anxiety that it should be preserved safely "against that day," when God shall judge the world. But to whom shall he entrust it? He knows of none but God that can keep it; and therefore he goes to God, and solemnly commits it into his hands, entreating him to order all its concerns, and, in whatever way he shall see best, to fit it for glory.]

To this he is prompted by manifold considerations—

[*He reflects on the fall of man in Paradise*, and says, 'Did Adam, when perfect, and possessed of all that he could wish, become a prey to the tempter, when the happiness of all his posterity, as well as his own, depended on his steadfastness; and can such a corrupt creature as I, surrounded as I am by innumerable temptations, hope to maintain my ground against my great adversary? O my God, let me not be for one moment left to myself; but take thou the charge of me; and let "my life be hid with Christ in God:" then, and then only, can I hope, that at the last coming of my Lord I shall appear with him in glory^b.']

He bears in mind also his own weakness and ignorance. He is conscious that "he has not in himself a sufficiency even to think a good thought;" and that "it is not in him to direct his way aright." Hence he desires to avail himself of the wisdom and power of God; and cries, "Lead me in the right way, because of mine enemies:" "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

But more especially he considers the gracious commands of God. God has not only permitted, but enjoined, this surrender of our souls to him^c. O what a privilege does the Christian account it to obey this divine injunction! How thankful is he that God will condescend to accept this deposit, and to take care of this charge! Hence he avails himself of this privilege, and says, "Hide me under the shadow of thy wings!" "O save me for thy mercy's sake!"]

Whilst he acts in this manner,

II. He is persuaded of God's ability to keep him—

He does not merely presume upon God's sufficiency: he is well persuaded of it,

1. From the report of others—

^b Col. iii. 3, 4.

^c 1 Pet. iv. 19. and Isai. xxvi. 20.

[He is informed by the inspired writers, *that God created the world out of nothing; and that he upholds and orders every thing in it*; insomuch that not a sparrow falls to the ground without his express permission. Hence then he argues; ‘Did God create my soul, and can he not uphold it? Did he form my enemies also, and can he not restrain them^d? Has he numbered even the hairs of my head, and will he overlook the concerns of my soul?’

He is told *that God is ever seeking opportunities, not only to exert, but also to magnify, his power in his people’s cause^e*. Shall all that vigilance, then, be exercised in vain? or shall any be able to prevail against him?

He is assured also *that God never yet lost one whom he had undertaken to keep*: he never suffered “one of his little ones to perish^f.” “None was ever plucked out of his hand^g.” not the “smallest grain of wheat, however agitated in the sieve, was ever permitted to fall upon the earth^h.” “The gates of hell have never been able to prevail against his Church.” Then, says the Christian, “I will trust, and not be afraid.” My Saviour, in the days of his flesh, “lost none that had been given himⁱ.” “Whom he loved, he loved to the end^k.” and therefore I am persuaded he will perfect that which concerneth me^l, and “complete in me the good work he has begun^m.”]

2. From his own experience—

[The Christian well remembers what he was by nature; and knows by daily experience what he should yet be, if Omnipotence were not exerted in his support. And hence he argues thus; ‘Has God created me anew, and by an invisible, but almighty, influence turned the tide of my affections, so that they now flow upward to the fountain from whence they sprang; and can he not keep me from going back? Has he kept me for many years, like the burning bush, encompassed, as it were, with the flame of my corruptions, yet not consumed by it; and “can any thing be too hard for him?”’ — — —

^a These arguments are indeed of no weight for the conviction of others; but to the Christian himself they are a source of the strongest conviction, and of the richest consolation: yea, from

^d See this argument suggested by God himself, *Isai. liv. 15—17.*
^{q. d.} “Your enemies are forming weapons; but I formed *them*; and whatever skill they exercise, I will defeat their attempts.”

^e 2 Chron. xvi. 9. This is meant by “shewing himself strong.”

^f Matt. xviii. 14.

^g John x. 28, 29.

^h Amos ix. 9.

ⁱ John xviii. 9.

^k John xiii. 1.

^l Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

^m Phil. i. 6.

these, more than from any others, he is enabled to say, "I *know* whom I have believed."

Moreover,

III. This persuasion is a strong support to him under all his trials—

Many are the difficulties of the Christian's warfare: but a persuasion of God's ability to keep him,

1. Encourages him to duty—

[The path of duty is sometimes exceeding difficult: and too many have fainted in it, or been diverted from it. But we may see in the Hebrew Youths what a persuasion of God's power will effect. They braved the furnace itself, from the consideration that God could deliver them from it, or support them in the midst of itⁿ. And thus will every Christian "encourage himself in God," and "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."]

2. Strengthens him for conflict—

[Under temptations of Satan, or the hidings of God's face, the most exalted Christian would sink, if he were not supported by this hope: "I had fainted," says David, "unless I had believed verily to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." But the thought that the grace of Christ is sufficient for him, will turn all his sorrows into joy^o: he will chide his dejected spirit^p, and return again to the charge, knowing that at last "he shall be more than conqueror through Him that loved him^q."]

3. Enables him to endure sufferings—

[Many and great were the sufferings of St. Paul; yet says he, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself." Thus every Christian must "go through much tribulation in the way to the kingdom:" but he learns, not only to bear, but to "glory in tribulation," because it gives him a more enlarged experience of God's power and grace, and thereby confirms his hope, which shall never make him ashamed^r.]

4. Assures him of final victory—

[Those who have not just views of God are left in painful suspense: but they who know whom they have believed, are as much assured of victory, as if all their enemies were lying dead at their feet^s.]

ⁿ Dan. iii. 17, 18. ^o 2 Cor. xii. 9. and Rom. vii. 24.

^p Ps. xlii. 11. ^q Rom. viii. 37. ^r Rom. v. 3—5.

^s Compare Isai. l. 7—9. with Rom. viii. 33—39.

We shall further IMPROVE the subject,

1. For conviction—

[All persons are ready to think that they are possessed of true and saving faith. But faith is not a mere assent to the truths of the Gospel, or even an approbation of them. It includes three things; *a committing of the soul to Christ; a persuasion of his ability to save us; and a determination to go forward in dependence upon him, doing and suffering whatever we are called to in the path of duty.*

Have we *this* faith? — — —]

2. For consolation—^t

[If there be any amongst us weak and dejected, let them turn their eyes to God as their Almighty Friend. Let them know that “He is able to make them stand^u”; he is “able to make all grace abound towards them, that they, having always all-sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work^x.” It is God himself who suggests to the fainting soul these very considerations; and he requires nothing, but that we wait on him in order that we may experience their truth and efficacy^y — — —

“Now unto Him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen^z.”]

^t If this were the subject of a *Funeral Sermon*, the excellencies of *the deceased* might here be enumerated, and *the survivors* be comforted by the consideration that *THEIR KEEPER* lives for ever.

^u Rom. xiv. 4.

^x 2 Cor. ix. 8.

^y Isai. xl. 27—31.

^z Jude, ver. 24, 25.

MMCCXLIV.

STRENGTH IN THE GRACE OF CHRIST.

2 Tim. ii. 1. *My son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*

HOW shall it be that all of us, who are assembled here this day, should ever get to heaven, so weak as we are, and so corrupt, and in the midst of so many and great dangers? I look back to the Apostle's days; and find, that when he was in prison at Rome, “all the converts that were of Asia, turned away from him;” but that one pious man, “Onesi-

phorus, sought him out with great diligence," to relieve his necessities, and to comfort his soul^a. Now, if reduced to such straits as the Apostle Paul was, for the Gospel's sake, how should we hope to stand? How should we avoid the apostasy of the many, and retain the fidelity of the few? This instruction the Apostle gives to his beloved Timothy: "Thou, *therefore*, my son, (seeing how hard it is to stand in times of severe trial,) be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus:" that is, 'know that there is grace treasured up for thee in Christ: and, in dependence upon that, thou shalt be able to sustain all the trials that shall come upon thee.'

To elucidate these words, I will shew,

I. What a fulness of grace there is treasured up for us in Christ—

But how can I present this to your minds in any intelligible shape? Methinks it can be done only in a way of illustration. Take, then, some scriptural illustrations; by means of which you may apprehend, in some considerable degree, the mysterious truth which I wish to submit to you.

Consider Christ, then,

1. As a Vine—

[This is our Lord's own suggestion: "I am the Vine; ye are the branches^b." Now we know, that every branch derives all its sap and nourishment from the vine; and that, if separated from the vine, it can bring forth no fruit whatever. This, then, will convey a very just idea of the connexion that subsists between Christ and his people; and of their entire dependence on him for every fresh supply of grace — — —

But an husbandman prunes the luxuriant branches of his vine; lest the sap being too widely diffused, its influence be weakened, and its fructifying power be abridged. In this, therefore, the image altogether fails: and we must look for one more suitable, by regarding Christ,]

2. As a Sun—

[This supplies the whole universe with light: and every individual of mankind, when exposed to its rays, enjoys as

^a 2 Tim. i. 15—18.

^b John xv. 5.

much of it as if he alone existed upon earth. Nor has he the less of its influence from its being extended to all the millions of mankind. Thus has every believer as much of Christ's gracious influence as his soul can need; having it neither increased by the paucity of those who partake of it, nor diminished by the numbers — — — "The Sun of Righteousness" is alike sufficient for all — — —

Yet the sun affords us not the same genial warmth in winter, as in the summer months; and at night it is altogether hid from us. In these respects, therefore, this image also fails. But we shall find an illustration more complete, if we consider Christ,]

3. As a Fountain—

[Under this character our blessed Lord commends himself to us: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." But especially is he compared with the rock smitten in the wilderness, "from whence gushed rivers of water," for the supply of all the people of Israel; and which followed them in very abundant streams, through all their journeying in the wilderness^c. Here then we have a more appropriate image: for as He is the only source of grace to every living soul, so may every one have access to him at all times, to obtain a supply fully commensurate with his utmost necessities. And in *this* does this image pre-eminently display the fulness that is in Christ Jesus, and the benefit to be derived from it; because "every soul that drinks of that living water has within himself a well of water, springing up to everlasting life:" so that, having Christ within him, he can never thirst again, nor want any other source, either of strength or comfort^d — — —

Without attempting to give any further illustration of what, after all, can never be adequately comprehended, I will only observe, that the representation is truly scriptural; since we are expressly told, that "it hath pleased the Father that in Christ should all fulness dwell^e," and that all his people are said to "receive, out of his fulness, grace for grace^f."]

Let us then consider,

II. Our duty in relation to it—

We are to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus;" that is,

1. We are to apply to him for it with simplicity—

[We should have it as a settled principle in our minds, that there is no strength in man, nor any other source of

^c 1 Cor. x. 4.

^d John iv. 13, 14. and vii. 37, 38.

^e Col. i. 19.

^f John i. 16.

grace than Christ Jesus: and without hesitation we should go to him from day to day, and from hour to hour, to receive it out of his fulness. We should not dream of meriting it at his hands, or of earning it by any thing that we can do: we should receive it as freely as the Israelites did the waters that issued from the rock; and should go to it as the only source of all that we need. Did the Israelites, think you, attempt to dig wells in the wilderness, when they had access to that stream? So then should we go to Christ for grace continually, and derive from him all that our necessities require — — —]

2. We are to rely upon it with confidence—

[We should never, for a moment, entertain doubts or fears respecting Christ's sufficiency to supply our wants. Whatever dangers threaten us, we should say, "There be more with us than with them^g:" and, "If God be for us, who can be against us^h?" He has told us, that, whatever be our necessities, "his grace is sufficient for us:" and therefore, instead of dreading trials, lest we should be vanquished by them, we should "take pleasure in them, that the power of Christ may rest upon us, and his strength be magnified in our weaknessⁱ" — — — "Knowing in whom we have believed," we should look upon "*our enemies as bread for us^k*," and view their assaults as preludes only to victory and triumph — — —]

Let me now ADD,

1. A word of caution—

[The circumstance of there being such a fulness treasured up for you in Christ does not in the least degree supersede the necessity for exertion on your part; no, nor of fear and watchfulness. To your latest hour you must be like Paul, who "kept his body under, and brought it into subjection; lest by any means, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away^l." You will see in the context, that you are to "endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ^m:" and your strength in Christ is not to render you forgetful of, but to fit you for, the warfare, which he has called you to maintainⁿ — — —]

2. A word of encouragement—

[Now, for eighteen hundred years has grace been flowing from the Lord Jesus for the supply of all his people. But do you suppose that his power to communicate is therefore

^g 2 Chron. xxxii. 7. ^h Rom. viii. 31. ⁱ 2 Cor. xii. 10.

^k Numb. xiv. 9. ^l 1 Cor. ix. 27. ^m ver. 4.

ⁿ Eph. vi. 10, 11.

lessened? When "virtue went forth from him," in the days of his flesh, "to heal all the multitudes that waited on him," was there less virtue in him than before? or has the sun lost any of its splendour by all the rays that it has emitted these six thousand years? Know, then, that Christ is still as able to save as ever, and that the very weakest amongst you all is authorized to say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me^o."

° Phil. iv. 13.

MMCCXLV.

CONSIDERATION ENFORCED.

2 Tim. ii. 7. *Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.*

HERE we behold a parent addressing his beloved son: here we behold an Apostle addressing the whole Church of God. In like manner would I now, with an union of parental love and apostolic authority, address you, my brethren: and I pray you to consider what I say: and may the Lord "give you understanding in all things!" The points to which I would draw your attention are,

I. The things proposed for Timothy's consideration—

Of course, we must look to the preceding context, to see what the Apostle had been saying. He had been urging Timothy to a performance of his ministerial duties: and *to ministers the subject primarily belongs*. But the duties are also of general import: and we may all consider ourselves as included under the different images that are here set before us:

1. As soldiers—

[In soldiers are required energy and devotion; such energy as will bear them up under all difficulties; and such devotion, as supersedes every other engagement, and determines them fully to approve themselves to the commander under whom they fight. Now, my beloved brethren, to this character all of us, both ministers and people, are to be conformed. We are all engaged to "fight the good fight of faith," and to "war a good warfare," under "the Captain of our salvation." For every one of us is armour provided, even "the

whole armour of God; which we are to put on," and by means of which we are to withstand all our enemies. But in this warfare we must, of necessity, meet with great trials, yea, and must sustain many afflictions. For, where is there a Christian who has not "his cross to bear, whilst following his Lord?" A soldier, by his very profession, expects to encounter difficulties: and his mind is made up to bear whatever evils he may meet with in the discharge of his duty: and precisely thus must we, having once girded on the sword, be prepared for privations, exertions, conflicts; and we must never think of rest, till all "our enemies are bruised under our feet."

As for other occupations, the soldier feels that he has no time for them. He cannot alienate his time and attention from the duties of his calling. The concerns of agriculture and commerce he leaves to others: and he concentrates all his energies in the more immediate duties of his profession; having no wish, no desire, but to approve himself faithful to his commander and his king. Thus, my brethren, it must be with *us*: with ministers in a more especial manner; because for them, by divine appointment, is a provision made, in order that they may be able to give themselves wholly and exclusively to the service of the sanctuary: and it is greatly to be regretted, that, in our Church, the provision made is so small as to render a compliance with God's appointment in this respect, in many instances, impracticable. But I hesitate not to say, that for a minister to "entangle himself in the affairs of this life" beyond what is necessary, is not the way to "please Him who has chosen him to be a soldier." And the same would I say, to a certain degree, respecting Christians in general. They have, it is true, and must have, their temporal employments, to which it is their duty to pay very diligent attention. But yet these must all be subordinated to the higher duties of religion: they must "seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" and disregard "the meat that perisheth," in comparison of that which "endureth to everlasting life." Every man must perform his duties in social and domestic life: but we must be "without carefulness;" and, whilst our heads and our hands are occupied with earthly pursuits, "our affections must be altogether set upon things above." To please our God must be, at all times and under all circumstances, our one concern.]

2. As wrestlers—

[The Apostle often takes his illustrations from the Grecian games. Here he compares us with wrestlers, who, however much they might exert themselves, were not crowned, unless they conformed exactly to the rules which were prescribed to

the contending parties. Now we, both ministers and people, are called to "wrestle, not with flesh and blood only, but with all the principalities and powers of hell:" and we have laid down for us, in the inspired volume, rules, to which we must rigidly adhere in all our conflicts. It is not sufficient that we put forth all our strength: we must put it forth in God's appointed way. For instance: Are we assaulted with evil? We must "not render evil for evil," but rather "do good to them that hate us;" and must persevere in *this* contest even to the end; "not being overcome of evil, but overcoming evil with good." Our blessed Lord has "set us an example," under every species of conflict and of suffering: and we are "to follow his steps." St. Paul, also, is a pattern which we should follow. He was "a man of like passions with us:" and therefore we may hope, that the grace which wrought so powerfully in him will work effectually in us also; and enable us "to be followers of him, as he was of Christ." A soldier never thinks of following his own mind or will in any thing. He looks to the orders issued by his commander; and to them he strictly adheres. Thus also must we, having not so much as a thought or wish to follow our own will, but a full determination to conform, in every particular act, and in the whole state and habit of our mind, to the revealed will of God. In a word, "we must strive lawfully," and in the precise way that God has marked out for us: and it is in that way alone that we can hope to have the crown of victory accorded to us.]

3. As husbandmen—

[We all know that the husbandman prosecutes his labours with a patient expectation of a distant, but rich reward. He does not expect the seed to produce a harvest the instant that it has been sown. He looks for many changes of the weather; and passes through many alternations of hope and fear; but he is sustained, through all, by a humble hope, that, in the end, God will give to him the fruit of his labours. Thus also must we, both ministers and people, go on in the work assigned to us; and, "by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality." We must not be discouraged because events do not turn out according to our wish or expectation. We must "wait the Lord's leisure;" and "let patience have its perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." "He that believeth, must not make haste." "Every vision is for an appointed time: and if it tarry, we must wait for it, assured, that it shall come in due season, and not tarry one instant beyond it." God had promised to Abraham to bring his posterity out of Egypt, at the distance of four hundred and thirty years: and had they been kept there one day longer, his promise would

utterly have failed. But *that self-same day* that the period was completed, he brought them forth. So, however long we may have to wait for a successful issue of our labours, we must “never faint or be weary in well-doing;” but must proceed with cheerfulness, assured, that “in due season we shall reap,” and “our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.”]

Now then attend, I pray you, to,

II. The injunction given him in relation to them,

First, says the Apostle,

1. “Consider what I say”—

[No good can be hoped for, even from apostolic instructions, if they be not duly and attentively considered. Now then let all of you consider, *How vast and arduous are your duties*. In the preceding context you have seen how all the offices of a soldier, a wrestler, and a husbandman, are combined in you: and, in fact, there is not any office sustained by any man on earth, from the king upon the throne to the meanest slave, that is not concentrated in you. You are called “a royal priesthood:” and if you, every one of you, are “kings and priests unto God,” you may well suppose that every subordinate employment must find its counterpart in you. Conceive, then, all the diversified occupations of all the human race to devolve on you, so far at least as to have their respective energies required at your hands; and then you will form some notion of the duties to which you are called.

But “consider,” also, *how great and indispensable are your obligations to fulfil them*. Ministers, doubtless, are bound by the most solemn ties to “fulfil their ministry;” not only because they have been most solemnly called to this office, and have pledged themselves to the performance of it, but because the souls of their people will be required at their hands. But every Christian, in his baptism, has consecrated himself to God: and every one, inasmuch as he professes to “have been bought with a price,” acknowledges himself bound to “glorify God with his body and his spirit, which are his.” Now then, consider this. Consider what that price is with which you have been redeemed, even with the precious blood of your incarnate God; and is there any service which you will account too arduous to engage in, or any suffering too heavy to endure, for the honour of his name? It was well said by St. Paul, “I beseech you by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, as your reasonable service:” and truly this is your reasonable service, that, as the burnt-offerings were wholly consumed upon the altar in sacrifice to God, so should every

faculty of your souls be wholly and exclusively devoted to your God.

Yet one thing more I beg you to "consider;" and that is, *How rich is the recompence that awaits you.* Look at the husbandman toiling at his work in the midst of winter; what a hopeless task does he, in appearance, perform! but look at his fields in the time of harvest, and you will say he is richly compensated. Thus will a minister find all his labours and sufferings abundantly repaid, when he shall bring before his Lord "those whom he has begotten by the Gospel;" saying, "Here am I, and the children thou hast given me." And how richly will every Christian be recompensed, when he shall hear, from the lips of his adored Lord, those glorious words, "Come, ye blessed children of my Father! inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Go, survey the glory and blessedness of heaven; and then say, my brethren, whether any thing can be too much for us either to do or suffer, in the prospect of such a recompence. Would you but consider these things as you ought, you would think that all the labours of the most devoted soldier, all the exertions of the most strenuous wrestler, and all the patience of the most laborious husbandman, are but faint representations of what may well be required at your hands.]

2. Seek of God an experimental acquaintance with them—

[Truly it is God alone that can bring you to such a state as this. *He alone can enable you to discern even the necessity of it, and much less its excellency.* The unenlightened man would account such a life as this "foolishness;" and a person aspiring after it would be condemned as a weak enthusiast, that was "righteous over much." To long for it, as the perfection of your nature, and as a heaven upon earth, is a feeling which no man on earth can possess, till he is born again, and renewed in the spirit of his mind by the Spirit of the living God. It is altogether a new creation in the soul of man.

Moreover, *God alone can guide you in such a path as this.* Whether a person be a minister or a private Christian, he shall find, that, in this high and heavenly course, there are situations wherein no human wisdom could guide him aright. There is a film over the eyes of man which obstructs his sight, and a bias in his heart that perverts his judgment. Never, till God has opened the eyes of our understanding, shall we see our way. When God has given us "a single eye, our whole body will be full of light;" but till then, "the light that is in us will be all darkness." See the situations and circumstances to which St. Paul was often reduced; and think how an unenlightened man would have acted in his place: and you will

soon see that, however “man may devise his way, God alone can direct his steps.”

Once more:—It is *God alone that can uphold us in the discharge of such duties*. Recall to mind all that has been set forth under the images to which my text refers; and then say, “Who is sufficient for these things?” Who can support the soul, so as that neither the world with all its temptations, nor the flesh with all its corruptions, nor the devil with all his wiles, shall be able to divert it from the path of duty, or to obstruct its progress in the heavenly life—who can do this but God alone? I say then, look to God to give you these high attainments, and to “fulfil in you all the good pleasure of his goodness.” Limit not either his power or his grace; but “open your mouth wide, and he will fill it.”

I conclude with repeating the injunction in my text: “Consider what I say; and the Lord will give you understanding in all things.”]

MMCCXLVI.

PAUL'S LOVE TO THE ELECT EXEMPLIFIED.

2 Tim. ii. 10. *I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*

THE labours of faithful ministers are, for the most part, but ill requited by a wicked and ungrateful world. But, in the midst of all the opposition they meet with, they have the consolation to know, that all efforts to stop the progress of the Gospel shall be in vain. This was St. Paul's comfort, when imprisoned at Rome for the word's sake, that, however *he* might be bound, the *word* was not; and “*therefore*” he submitted the more cheerfully to his troubles, being assured, that his endeavours to save the souls of his fellow-creatures would be crowned with success.

This subject leads us to consider,

I. St. Paul's love to the elect—

Notwithstanding the word “elect” has passed into a term of reproach, there most assuredly is an elect people, “a remnant according to the election of

grace^a," whom "God has chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth^b."

Towards these St. Paul felt a peculiar regard—

[He loved all, even his very enemies, and would gladly have submitted to the heaviest afflictions for their sake^c. But his love to the elect was both more exalted in its nature, and more abundant in its degree. He considered them as the special objects of God's love; as children of the same heavenly parent; as members of the same mystical body; and as fellow-heirs of the same glory. Hence they were all engraven on his very heart: and hence he exhorts us, while we do good unto all men, to do it more especially unto the household of faith^d.]

For their sake he willingly endured every trouble that could come upon him—

[No man ever endured so much as he in his Master's cause. This we may see from the long catalogue of his troubles which he himself has left us^e. But, says he, "None of these things move me^f:" "I rejoice in my sufferings for the elect's sakes^g:" "most gladly will I spend and be spent for them, though the more abundantly I love them, the less I be loved^h:" I am so "affectionately desirous of them, that I am willing to impart to them, not the Gospel only, but my own soul also, because they are dear unto meⁱ:" "yea, if I be offered (and my blood be poured out as a libation) upon the sacrifice and service of their faith, I joy and rejoice with them all, and desire them also to joy and rejoice with me^k;" for, so far am I from looking forward to it with fear, or accounting it an occasion of grief, that I esteem it a blessed subject of mutual congratulations.]

How amiable and praiseworthy was this heavenly disposition!

[Certainly the love of Christ in dying for us, infinitely exceeds all that ever was manifested by any human being. But, next to Christ, St. Paul seems to have most abounded in love to man. He was indeed a very bright resemblance of his Divine Master. And what a world would this be, if all were actuated by the same spirit and temper! Even those who cultivate least of this spirit themselves, must confess, that

^a Rom. xi. 5.

^b 2 Thess. ii. 13.

^c Rom. ix. 1—3.

^d Gal. vi. 10.

^e 2 Cor. xi. 23—28.

^f Acts xx. 24.

^g Col. i. 24.

^h 2 Cor. xii. 15.

ⁱ 1 Thess. ii. 8.

^k Phil. ii. 17.

the universal prevalence of it would make a very heaven upon earth.]

But the Apostle's regard to the elect was not a mere carnal affection, as we shall see, if we consider,
II. The end he aimed at on their behalf—

The happiness provided for the elect, is exceeding great and glorious—

[For them is reserved "salvation," even salvation from sin and Satan, death and hell. It is, moreover, a salvation "with glory;" not a mere exemption from punishment, but an unspeakable felicity in the immediate vision and fruition of their God. Nor is it ever to come to an end: its duration will continue as long as the soul itself shall exist. To crown the whole, it is a salvation in Christ Jesus, not merely as it is purchased by his blood (though *that* will infinitely enhance its value) but as it is treasured up in him, and shall be enjoyed in and through him, as the one medium of its communication for ever and ever.]

That they might obtain this, was the great object of his desires, the one scope of his labours—

[He had no doubt at all respecting his own salvation¹. But could he be content to go to heaven alone? No; he would gladly have drawn all he could along with him^m. It was for this end that he became all things to all menⁿ: and to this he looked forward as his joy, his hope, his crown of rejoicing^o. There was not one weak, but he sympathized with him; not one turned aside, but he burned with an ardent desire to restore him^p. To such a degree was his soul bound up in the welfare of the elect, that he could say, "Now I live, if ye stand fast in the Lord:" nor did any thing appear too great for him either to do, or suffer, provided he might be instrumental in accomplishing this blessed end^q.]

INFER—

1. What reason have most professors of religion to be ashamed of their attainments!

[Beyond a doubt, the Apostle's spirit ought to be the spirit of all Christians^r. But how little of it is seen in the Christian Church! How many are there who are ready to "bite and devour one another," instead of being willing to lay down their lives for each other! And how little self-denial is

¹ 2 Cor. v. 1.

^m So the church. Cant. i. 4.

ⁿ 1 Cor. ix. 22.

^o 1 Thess. ii. 19.

^p 2 Cor. xi. 29.

^q 1 Thess. iii. 7—9.

^r 1 John iii. 16.

there even in the best of us! How little will we do, or suffer, either for the temporal or spiritual welfare of our brethren! Let us blush at our want of love; and labour henceforth to benefit the bodies, and more especially to save the souls, of all around us.]

2. How infatuated are they who have no concern for their own souls!

[Wherefore was Paul so earnest for the salvation of others, but because he knew somewhat of the value of a soul? He knew its happiness, if saved; and its misery, if lost. Shall another then be more concerned for us, than we for ourselves? Shall another be ready to do and suffer all things for us, and we be unwilling to do or suffer any thing for our own good? Let us remember, that no present gratifications can compensate for the loss of salvation; and that eternal glory will infinitely over-balance all that can be endured in the pursuit of it.]

3. How must they be blinded by the devil, who oppose the salvation of their fellow-creatures!

[There are too many who scoff at piety, and endeavour, by ridicule or persuasion, to turn men from the practice of it. Alas! what an awful contrast do their characters form with that of the Apostle! Let such consider the warning given them by our Lord, that it were better for them to have a mill-stone hanged about their neck, and to be cast into the sea, than they should offend one of his little ones^s.]

^s Luke xvii. 2.

MMCCXLVII.

THE EQUITY OF GOD'S PROCEDURE.

2 Tim. ii. 11—14. *It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself. Of these things put them in remembrance.*

STRANGE as it may seem, it is no uncommon thing for men to arraign the equity of God, and to accuse him of undue severity in the execution of his judgments. The Jewish people of old complained, "The ways of the Lord are not equal:" and God, for his own honour's sake, was constrained to vindicate his character in this respect; which he did in

an open appeal to their judgment, and a candid exposition of the modes of his procedure. "O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?" "If a man have sinned and repent, I forgive him: but if he turn back to his former wickedness, I make no account of his temporary reformation, but visit all his iniquities upon his head. Is this unequal? Is it not consonant with strict justice^a?" In like manner St. Paul declares, in the passage before us, that God will act towards men as they act towards him; requiting with good his faithful servants, and marking the disobedient as objects of his displeasure. And that he may the more deeply impress this truth upon our minds, he introduces it with assuring us, that "it is a faithful saying."

From his words we shall be led to consider,

I. The rule of God's procedure in reference to our future destinies—

The whole Scripture declares that he will deal with men according to their works; that "to those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life; but that to them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there shall be indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, even upon every soul of man that doeth evil^b."

To this effect we are here told how God will deal,

1. With the godly—

[It is here supposed that the godly will "die with Christ, and suffer with him." And it is true, that all his faithful followers are "crucified with him^c," and "dead with him." As he died *for* sin, so they, in conformity to him, and by virtue derived from him, die *to* sin: they no longer suffer it to act without controul, as once they did, but they "mortify it in all their members," and "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts^d." In acting thus, they of necessity condemn the "world around them, who are lying in wickedness^e," and ordering their course agreeably to the will of Satan, who worketh in them^f,

^a Ezek. xxxiii. 17—20.

^b Rom. ii. 7—9.

^c Gal. ii. 20.

^d Gal. v. 24.

^e 1 John v. 19.

^f Eph. ii. 2.

and "leads them captive at his will^g." In consequence of this, they are hated, reviled, and persecuted, as their Saviour was; and are called to "suffer," even as he suffered. There is not one of them who has not his cross to bear. Times and circumstances may cause a difference as to the degree in which they shall suffer: but there is no exception whatever to that declaration of the Apostle, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution^h."

Now how will God deal with these? Will he overlook them as unworthy of his notice? Will he afford them no succour, and recompense them with no reward? Far be it from him; for "if we be dead with Christ, we shall also live with him;" that is, he will enable us to execute our holy purposes, and to rise superior to all our spiritual adversaries, even as he did when he rose again from the dead. This is the explanation which St. Paul himself gives us: "If we have been planted in the likeness of his death," says he, "we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. But he that is dead, is freed from sin. Now, if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over him: for, in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lordⁱ." The same Apostle also gives it as his own actual experience: "We are always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body: for we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh^k." Thus does the Lord Jesus fulfil the promise which he made in reference to this very point; "Because I live, ye shall live also^l."

Moreover our God engages, that, "if we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him." Our services shall not be forgotten. There is "a crown of glory prepared for all them that love him^m:" even on that very throne which Christ himself occupies, shall they be seated with himⁿ. Yes; it is a faithful saying, that "they who suffer with him shall also be glorified together^o."

This then will be the mode of God's procedure towards his faithful people: and according to the same rule will he proceed,]

^g ver. 26.

^h 2 Tim. iii. 12.

ⁱ Rom. vi. 5—11.

^k 2 Cor. iv. 10, 11.

^l John xiv. 19.

^m 2 Tim. iv. 8. 1 Pet. v. 4.

ⁿ Rev. iii. 21.

^o Rom. viii. 17. 1 Pet. iv. 13.

2. With the ungodly—

[These are here designated as “those who deny him.” Now there are two ways in which this may be done; namely, either by an open and avowed rejection of his Gospel^p, or by a timid concealment of our convictions. Of the former we shall have no occasion to speak, because it is the latter class only that are referred to in our text; and because all that we shall have occasion to say respecting the latter, must of necessity be in a yet stronger degree applicable to the former: for, if those who do believe in Christ, but through fear of persecution are deterred from confessing him openly, will be disapproved by him, much more will they who impiously blaspheme his name, and pour contempt upon all the wonders of his love and mercy.]

Our Lord requires, that we should confess him openly before men. But there are many, who, “when persecution or tribulation ariseth because of the word, are offended^q,” and dare not face the obloquy, or encounter the perils, that await them. And how will the Lord Jesus Christ deal with *them*? Will he take no account of their cowardice? Will he be satisfied with *such* a mode of requiting all his love? No; he will deal with them in the way that they deal with him: “they are ashamed of him; and he will be ashamed of them, in the day that he shall come in the glory of his Father, and of all his holy angels^r.” “they deny him; and he will deny them^s.” And this is nothing but what they may reasonably expect: for if their love to him is so small, that they will not endure a little shame, or submit to some trifling loss, for his sake, how can they expect to be approved as good and faithful servants? How can they suppose it possible that they should partake of that felicity which is reserved for those who fought the good fight of faith, and “loved not their lives unto death^t?” *This* indeed would be unequal: such inequality shall never be found in the judgments of our God: for “they who loved their lives, shall lose them; and they only who are willing to lose their lives for Christ’s sake, shall save them unto life eternal^u.”]

That no doubts on this subject may rest upon our minds, I will go on to state,

II. The assurance we have that he will proceed according to this rule—

The declarations of God on these subjects do not obtain the credit they deserve—

^p 2 Pet. ii. 1.

^q Matt. xiii. 21.

^r Mark viii. 38.

^s Matt. x. 33.

^t Rev. xii. 11.

^u Mark viii. 34, 35

[Many of the godly are apt, through the weakness of their faith, to yield to doubts and fears. When feeling the depth of their corruptions, they think it almost impossible that they should ever be able to subdue them: and, when menaced with heavy trials, they doubt whether they shall ever be able to support them.

The ungodly, on the other hand, boldly question whether God ever *can* proceed with them according to his word. They do not hesitate to say, that such a procedure would be cruel and unjust. 'If indeed they were to abandon themselves to all manner of wickedness, they might *then* expect the Divine judgments: but when they can have no gross evils laid to their charge, is it to be supposed that God will punish them to all eternity, merely because they do not (*as they will call it*) make a parade of their religion? *That* is nothing but a conceit of enthusiastical zealots: God is too good to act in such a way, or to visit with such unmerited severity what, at the worst, can only be deemed an excess in the exercise of prudence' — —]

But, whether believed or not, they shall all be fulfilled in their season—

["Our unbelief will not make the truth of God of none effect^x." Whatever he has spoken, he will surely execute; as it is said, "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good^y?" Were he to reverse his word for us, he would cease to be a God of truth. He has pledged himself for the accomplishment of every word that he has spoken: and "he cannot deny himself."

True it is, that he is not pleased with the weakness of his people's faith. He complained of it in Peter: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" But he will not on this account neglect to fulfil to them his promises. He has engaged in behalf of those who die unto sin, that "his grace shall be sufficient for them^z;" that "their strength shall be according to their day^a;" and that "they shall be more than conquerors, through Him that loved them^b." Their doubts and fears will indeed distress their minds, and weaken their efforts, and subject them to many anxieties from which a stronger exercise of faith would have freed them: but still he will not cast them off because they are weak: "he will not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax; but will bring forth judgment unto victory^c." And in the last day he will recompense into their bosom all that they have done or

^x Rom. iii. 3.

^y Numb. xxiii. 19.

^z 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^a Deut. xxiii. 25.

^b Rom. viii. 37.

^c Matt. xii. 20.

suffered for him. He will say, "Thou hast been faithful in a few things; be thou ruler over many things^d:" and the precise measure of their glory shall be proportioned to the labours and sufferings to which in this life they had submitted for his sake^e.

In like manner, to the ungodly he will award a sentence of condemnation proportioned to their deserts. It will be to no purpose that they expostulate, and ask, as if aggrieved by his sentence, "Lord, have we not in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works?" He will be altogether inflexible; and will say, "Depart from me; I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity^f."

The importance of this subject appears from the solemn charge with which St. Paul enjoins Timothy to "put his hearers in remembrance of it." The same charge is in fact given to every minister of God's word: "Put your people in remembrance of these things." In compliance with this command I will now proceed yet further to REMIND you of them,

1. For your conviction—

[It is to no purpose to dispute against God. A criminal may dispute against human laws if he will, and may determine beforehand that they can never be executed against him. But the only effect of his confidence will be, to deceive his own soul, and to involve himself in irremediable ruin. Let him be ever so assured of impunity, he will not be able to stop the course of the law, or to prevent its execution upon him. How much less then can we suppose that the arm of God's justice shall be arrested, and the very truth of God violated, to rescue a man from perdition, merely because he will not believe that God will fulfil his word. I must declare to you, that all such hopes are groundless: and I call upon you carefully to examine the state of your own souls. Are you "dead to sin," to *all* sin, so that no iniquity whatever is suffered to have dominion over you? — Are you openly confessing Christ before men, so that it is seen and known "whose you are, and whom you profess to serve?" Are you "following him without the camp, bearing his reproach^g;" and not bearing it only, but "rejoicing that you are counted worthy to suffer for his sake^h?" In a word, are you Christians, not in word only, but in deed and in truth? These are the inquiries which you must make; for by them alone can you ascertain your state before God. Say not, that, in requiring these things, we require too much:

^d Matt. xxv. 23.

^e 2 Cor. iv. 17.

^f Matt. vii. 22, 23.

^g Heb. xiii. 13.

^h Acts v. 41.

for if God require them, and will receive to mercy those only in whom these requisites can be found, it will be to no purpose to contend with him. Be wise in time: and so endeavour to approve yourselves to God now, that he may approve of you in the day of judgment.]

2. For your comfort and support—

[The workings of unbelief have harassed many who were truly upright before God: and therefore we should not write bitter things against ourselves, merely because we possess not a full assurance of faith. David on some occasions was quite overwhelmed with doubts and fears. Hear his complaints: “Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?” But whence arose all this? Had it any foundation in truth? No: he immediately acknowledges, “This is mine infirmityⁱ.” So then do ye say, when doubts and fears assail your minds. Remember, God is a faithful God, and not one jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail. “Of those whom the Father gave to Jesus, he lost none^k,” nor will he ever lose one: “not the smallest grain of true wheat shall ever fall upon the earth^l,” nor “shall one of God’s little ones ever perish^m.” Only commit yourselves to God, and leave the issue of events to him. Your part is to be seeking a conformity to Christ in his death and resurrection; and his part is to carry on and perfect his work within you. Be ye intent on your part; and leave His to him: and you shall be able at the last to say with Joshua, that “of all the good things which the Lord your God hath spoken concerning you, all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failedⁿ.”]

ⁱ Ps. lxxvii. 7—10.

^k John xvii. 12.

^l Amos ix. 9.

^m Matt. xviii. 14.

ⁿ Josh. xxiii. 14.

MMCCXLVIII.

THE STABILITY OF THE COVENANT.

2 Tim. ii. 19. *The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity.*

GOD has a people whom he will preserve from apostasy: but he will keep them by the instrumentality of their own care and watchfulness. There were

some in the apostolic age seduced from the faith, and led to think that the resurrection was passed already. But St. Paul entertained no fears for the ark of God. He was persuaded that God would keep his faithful people: "they overthrew the faith of some: nevertheless," &c.

I. What is meant by the foundation of God—

It does not seem to refer to the doctrine of the resurrection. The context indeed mentions this doctrine; but the immediate connexion of the text is with the apostasy that had prevailed. The "foundation" relates rather to the covenant of grace. In some respects Christ is the *only* foundation^a. Nevertheless the covenant of grace may be represented in this light—

It is the foundation of *God's dealings towards us*—

[From a regard to it he bears with us in our *unconverted* state^b: from a regard to it he effects our *conversion*^c: from a regard to it he endures our backslidings *after conversion*^d: from a regard to it he restores us after we have fallen^e.]

It is also the foundation of *our hope towards God*—

[We have no claim upon God independent of the covenant; but in his covenant with Christ, and with us in him, he has engaged to give us all that we want^f. We receive spiritual blessings, only as being parties in it^g; the continuance of those blessings to us is only in consequence of our interest in it^h.]

This foundation standeth sure.

II. Wherein its stability consists—

The foundation of God is represented as having a sealⁱ. This seal is God's unchanging love; "God knoweth them," &c.

^a 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^c 2 Tim. i. 9. Jer. xxxi. 3.

^e Luke xxii. 32.

^g Rom. viii. 29, 30.

^b Ezek. xxxvi. 21—23, 32.

^d 1 Sam. xii. 22.

^f 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

^h Rom. ix. 16.

ⁱ There is no confusion of metaphor here, because foundation stones often have *σφραγίδα*, an inscription (as the word means, Rev. ix. 4.) But there is peculiar propriety in the metaphor of a seal as applied to a covenant.

[Knowledge is here, as in many other places, put for love^k: in this sense it is represented as a seal of the covenant. Love is stamped, as it were, on every part of the covenant, gives a kind of validity to it, and is inseparable from it.]

This unchanging love is the stability of the covenant—

[We should continually forfeit our interest in it: no believer whatever, if left to himself, would be steadfast in it. Our daily transgressions are sufficient to exclude us from it for ever; but God's love changeth not^l. He betroths us to himself in faithfulness for ever^m. He loves and keeps us, not for our sake, but for his own name's sakeⁿ: hence all our security arises^o.]

The covenant, however, does not make void our obligations to holiness,

III. The improvement we should make of it—

The privileges of Christians are exceeding great: but we are in danger of turning the grace of God into licentiousness. Hence the Apostle cautions us against abusing this covenant^p—

[They “who name the name of Christ” are those who profess Christ's religion; and *that* profession supposes them to be interested in the covenant. But continuance in sin would be inconsistent with that profession: the covenant prohibits the indulgence even of the smallest sin. It provides strength for the mortification of every lust; it secures holiness to us as well as salvation; it engages for our salvation *only* in a way of holiness. Let it not then be made a ground of presumptuous security: let it rather operate as an incentive to diligence; let it incline “every one” to stand at the greatest distance from sin^q.]

INFER—

What rich consolation is here for every true believer!

^k Ps. i. 6.

^l Jam. i. 17. Rom. xi. 29.

^m Hos. ii. 19.

ⁿ Deut. vii. 6—8.

^o St. Paul considers the steadfastness of the foundation as connected with, and depending on, God's immutable regard for his people; and to this is their final salvation to be ascribed, Mal. iii. 6.

^p If καὶ were translated “*but*” the sense would be incomparably more clear: it has this sense in many places; and is so translated, 2 Tim. iii. 11. and 1 Cor. xvi. 12.

^q Ἀποστήτω ἀπὸ.

[There ever have been some apostates from the Church of Christ; but their defection does not disprove the stability of God's covenant. The reason of their departure is accounted for by St. John^r— Let not then any be dejected when they see the falls of others. God “knows” his sheep, and will suffer “none to pluck them out of his hands.” Nor need any despond on account of their indwelling corruptions: it is not *sin lamented*, but *sin indulged*, that will destroy the soul. Let every one be more anxious to lay hold on this covenant: it will be found at last, that it is “ordered in all things and sure.”]

^r 1 John ii. 19.

MMCCXLIX.

SAINTS, VESSELS OF HONOUR.

2 Tim. ii. 20, 21. *In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work.*

IT was said by a heathen poet, and the truth and importance of the sentiment are strongly marked by its being cited by an inspired Apostle, that “evil communications corrupt good manners.” But there is by no means such attention paid to this aphorism as its importance demands. Men will indeed caution their friends against the society of those who are dissolute and profane; but, against those who may distract our minds with matters of doubtful disputation, or lower our standard of Christian duty, no one judges it necessary to put us on our guard. But St. Paul, that vigilant watchman, that faithful servant of the Most High God, has taught us to shun every thing which may pervert our judgment, or corrupt our minds, or in any way impede our progress in the Divine life. In the words which I have now read to you, he shews us,

I. What we must guard against, as injurious to our souls—

Two things he mentions, as necessary for us to be purged from ;

1. Error in principle—

[Even in that early age of the Church, there were many, who, instead of upholding the faith, sought, by all imaginable subtilties, to turn men from their adherence to it. False teachers there were in great numbers, who “ strove about words which were of no real profit, but tended only to the subverting of the hearers^a.” Against these St. Paul strongly guarded his son Timothy: “ Shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness, and their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenæus and Philletus; who concerning the truth have erred; saying, that the resurrection is passed already; and overthrow the faith of some^b.” Now such persons there have been in the Church, from that day even to the present hour. Some will magnify beyond due bounds the importance of some favourite doctrine, to the utter exclusion of other doctrines which have a different aspect. Others will dwell upon the circumstantialia of religion, to the neglect of the points that are most essential. Others, again, will attack the fundamentals themselves; “ bringing in damnable heresies, and denying the Lord who bought them.” Some, like the Pharisees of old, will make all religion to consist in the observance of rites and ceremonies: others will cast off every kind of ritual, and divest religion of every outward form. Some will discard from religion every thing that is mysterious or spiritual; whilst others will spiritualize every thing, and involve the most common truths of Scripture in mystery and allegory, like those who reduced the doctrine of the resurrection to the mere introduction of another dispensation, or the moral change that is wrought on the hearts of Christian converts. In fact, there is no end of the absurdities which men will introduce into religion, according to their respective fancies: and their zeal for their respective peculiarities will be considered by them as the best proofs of their zeal for religion. But it will be our wisdom “ to purge ourselves from all such persons and sentiments; and to hold fast, with childlike simplicity, the truth as it is in Jesus.” For, in fact, these dispositions and habits are the fruits of vain conceit; and they gender nothing but strife and contention. In a word, they all “ eat like a gangrene;” which, if not healed, will gradually destroy the whole body.]

2. Corruption in practice—

[This is invariably connected with the former: for the very alienation of heart, both from God and man, which

^a ver. 14.

^b ver. 16—18.

controversial habits generate, must, of necessity, give advantage to Satan for the infusion of all manner of evil into our souls. Hence St. Paul, in his advice to Timothy, combines with a caution against error, a caution against sin also: "Flee youthful lusts; but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace with all them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart: but foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes." Amongst youthful lusts we must doubtless, in the first place, number those corrupt propensities which are so powerful in the time of youth: but we must also number those which are more nearly allied with heresies, whilst yet they are peculiarly influential on the youthful mind; such as, a love of novelty, a fondness for disputation, a desire after notoriety and distinction. The tempers which these habits generate are extremely hateful to God, and injurious to man. "The filthiness of the flesh," as the Apostle speaks, is, *in appearance*, more opposite to true religion than what he calls "the filthiness of the spirit:" but it is not so *in reality*: and we must be purged from *this*, no less than from *the other*, if ever we would serve God acceptably, or be approved by him in the day of judgment. The beauty of all true religion consists in a child-like spirit, which is the very reverse of that conceit and forwardness which characterize the controversialist and vain disputer. I must therefore guard you, with all earnestness, against every thing which may corrupt your mind from the simplicity that is in Christ, or weaken the influence of real piety in your souls.]

And, that my exhortation may have the greater weight, let me proceed to shew,

II. What benefit we shall derive from this care—

In a great house, the Apostle observes, there is a great variety of vessels; some of purer, and others of baser, materials; some to honour, and others to dishonour. So also, in the Church of Christ, there is a great variety of persons; all indeed in some way or other subserving his interests, and widely differing from each other in their value, their use, and their ultimate destination.

Now those who are infected with evil principles or practice are of no estimation before God.

[Their spirit is hateful to him, as is their conduct also; nor are they of any use in the Church of God. They tend

rather to corrupt others, than to benefit their souls; and to dishonour their profession, rather than adorn it. In fact, they are base in themselves, and subserve only base purposes: and "their end will be according to their works."]

But "those who are purged from these will be regarded by him as vessels of honour, meet for their Master's use.

[Under this image, the Apostle means to suggest, that persons of simple minds and pure habits shall *be favoured with God's peculiar regard, be set apart for his special service, and be made use of for his honour and glory.* These are the distinctions conferred on "vessels of gold and silver in a great house or palace;" whilst the vessels of wood and of earth are disregarded and despised. Now, those nobler vessels are polished with care, in order that they may appear worthy of their owner, and of the uses to which they are applied: so are the godly "sanctified" by the Holy Ghost, and "prepared for every good work" to which they are destined.

Now, I would ask, is not this a great encouragement to us to keep ourselves pure? Is not this honour an abundant recompence for all the self-denial we can exercise, and all the caution we can maintain? See the golden vessel in the hand of the prince; its beauty, its symmetry, its splendour, admired by him; yea, and his own honour, as it were, advanced by it: and can you contemplate yourself thus in the hands of the God of heaven, and not feel a desire to be accounted worthy of that honour? I say, then, "purge yourselves from" every thing which, in a way either of principle or of practice, may defile you, and this honour shall be yours.]

Now, then, say whether there be not in this subject

ABUNDANT MATTER,

1. For anxious inquiry—

[To which of these widely-different vessels may you be compared? Which of them do you resemble, in their essential qualities, or in their habitual use? Are you of gold or silver, or of the baser materials of wood or earth? Are you altogether consecrated to God? or are you occupied solely about the things of time and sense? To assist you in this inquiry, I must observe, that no man possesses, by nature, those higher qualities: they are all the fruits of grace: by nature we are earthly, sensual, devilish: it is by grace alone that we become heavenly, spiritual, divine. And, to judge whether this change have been wrought in us, we must not look to our outward conduct merely, but to that inward purification from erroneous principles and corrupt affections.

See, then, whether you have yet been brought to humble yourselves before God, as guilty and undone sinners: see whether you are living altogether by faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, as your only source, either of righteousness or strength; and see whether you are devoting yourselves, unreservedly, to God in all holy obedience: *this* is the proper test of conversion: all other conversions are of no value: you may go the whole round, from one Church to another, espousing every one of them in succession, and zealously maintaining every distinction, whether in principle or practice, and yet be vessels in which God can take no pleasure, and which shall finally be hid from his eyes as objects of shame only and dishonour. Let this then be, as in truth it ought to be, a matter of anxious inquiry amongst you all: for I must again declare, that they only shall be approved of their God who correspond with the character drawn of them in our text.]

2. For necessary distinction—

[Here, you perceive, are “vessels of gold and of silver, as also of wood and of earth;” and, though all of one common origin, and alike of base materials, yet destined, some to honour, and others to dishonour. You perceive, also, that it is God alone who makes the difference between them; changing the nature and end of some, whilst others are left to their original worthlessness and debasement. Against this our proud hearts would be ready to rise; just as that of the objector did, when St. Paul declared, that “God had mercy on whom he would have mercy; and whom he would he hardened.” Hear the Apostle’s statement of the objector’s argument; and his reply to it: “Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory^d?” This is the answer which I also must make to any one who shall object to the statement which has been before made. I grant, yea, I assert, that all, as born into this world, are base in their nature, their use, and their end: and it is grace alone, even the sovereign grace of God, that changes them so that they become vessels of honour for his use. I

^d Rom. ix. 18—23.

assert, too, with the Apostle, that the same power which the potter has over the clay, our God has over all the works of his hands. But there is a distinction which the Apostle has made, and which we must ever bear in mind, that, though *it is God alone who prepares any for glory*, yet *man fits himself for destruction*: so that, whilst the godly have no ground for boasting, the ungodly have no reason whatever for complaint^e. To all eternity must those who are vessels of honour ascribe the glory to their God; but the vessels to dishonour will, through all eternity, be constrained to take all the shame to themselves.]

3. For grateful adoration—

[Let any one contemplate the state of a pious soul in glory. Let him see the feast that is there spread, at which God himself presides. Let him behold the vessels of gold and silver, polished to the utmost possible perfection, the ornament of the feast, the honour of their God; and every one of them filled to the utmost brim with all the richest effusions of blessedness and joy: then let him contrast with these the vessels of wrath, filled with the overflowings of God's wrathful indignation: let any one, I say, contemplate the contrast; and then determine, whether those monuments of grace and mercy have not grounds for gratitude and praise? I trust, that to many of this description I am now addressing myself; and to them I would say, See to it that nothing which can defile, be admitted within you: see also that you be more and more polished every day and hour, that you may grow in a meetness for the honour that awaits you. And be looking forward to the time when your final destiny shall be awarded to you; and you shall, as objects of God's love, and monuments of his grace, be for ever "filled with all the fulness of your God."]

^e See the Greek of the fore-cited passage.

MMCCL.

THE GREAT ENDS OF THE MINISTRY.

2 Tim. ii. 25, 26. *In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.*

THE work of the ministry is arduous in the extreme, not only on account of the labours in which a

pastor has to engage, but on account of the opposition he meets with from those whose welfare he seeks. He has to call men from all which by nature they affect, and to stimulate them to much for which they have an utter distaste. But the hope of ultimately benefiting immortal souls is sufficient to carry him forward; and, if he be himself of a becoming spirit, he will persevere with patience and long-suffering, "meekly instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure may give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth."

To enter fully into the subject before us, I must set before you,

I. The state of unconverted men—

I am not aware that there is any other passage of Holy Writ that places this matter in a more humiliating view, than that which we have just read.

The unconverted man is altogether a slave of Satan—

[The agency of Satan is but little thought of by us, though it occupies a very prominent place in the Scriptures of truth. His influence over Judas and Ananias shews what he can effect, if God see fit to withdraw the restraints which, from love to mankind, he has imposed upon him. This malignant fiend is, in fact, "the god of this world;" and all mankind, whilst in their unconverted state, are his vassals — — — Yet it is not by force that he reigns over them, but by subtilty. He "takes them captive;" but it is by "snares" that he allures them, and draws them into his net. He knows what is suited to each, as a fowler or a fisherman does to the taste and appetite of the different creatures he would decoy: and he finds the whole human race ready enough to yield to his devices, and to surrender up themselves to him according to his will — — — To persons in early life he offers the gratifications of sense; and to those at a more advanced period the acquisition of wealth and honour. Nor is he more anxious to ensnare them, than they are to swallow the bait which he has laid for their destruction — — — In truth, if they were to form a deliberate purpose to serve Satan as far as they possibly could consistently with the preservation of a good character among men, they could not do it more effectually than they already do. Satan would not wish them to live in a more entire neglect of God and of eternity than

they do: nor could he wish them more habitually to cheat themselves with a mere name and form of godliness than they do — — —]

And this is the state of all, without exception—

[Men have their different tastes: one loves gross immorality, whilst another prefers a self-complacent round of outward duties. But these are only the baits which they affect: their radical neglect of God and of his Christ is the same in both. The Apostles themselves, not excepting St. Paul in his unconverted state, were once subjects of this great usurper: “We ourselves,” says St. Paul, “were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures^a.” And by whose influence they were kept in this awful condition, he tells us in another place: “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, *according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience*: among whom we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind^b.” Here, you perceive, they were actuated by their own lusts; yet did they most effectually accomplish the will of the great deceiver^c — — — “His they were, and him they served;” and from that kingdom of darkness must all be delivered, if ever they would “be translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son^d.”]

The directions given to Timothy, for the regulation of his conduct towards them, leads me to notice,

II. The efforts of ministers in their behalf—

Ministers are appointed of God to instruct the world in the things which belong to their everlasting peace.

They are to rescue men, if possible, from the power of Satan—

[They find men sleeping in security, and, like persons *in a state of intoxication*, unconscious of their danger^e: and they endeavour to awaken them. With this view they cry, “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give thee light^f.” They call the poor unhappy victims to “repentance, and to an acknowledgment of the

^a Tit. iii. 3. ^b Eph. ii. 1—3. ^c Rev. xii. 9. ^d Col. i. 13.

^e Acts xxvi. 18. This seems to be implied in the term *ἀνανήψωσιν*.

^f Eph. v. 14.

truth as it is in Jesus." They set forth the claims of their God and Saviour to their allegiance, and the evil and danger of continuing in rebellion against him. They declare, that if they will submit themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, he will forgive all their past sins, and bring them into the glorious liberty of the children of God — — — This they do, to lead the poor captives to cast off the yoke of Satan, and serve the living God — — —]

But their only hope of success is in God alone—

[They know how vain it would be for them to engage in this warfare, if God himself do not interpose to give them the victory. They know, that though "Paul should plant, and Apollos water, God alone can give the increase." Nor are they sure that he will work by them: much less do they know for whose particular benefit they may be sent. They can only "draw their bow at a venture," and leave it to God to direct the shaft. A mere "peradventure," however, is quite sufficient to stimulate their exertions. If they be but the happy instrument of delivering one soul from Satan's yoke, they will account it an ample recompence for a whole life of labour. With their ministrations to men, therefore, they unite their supplications to God; if peradventure he may "give to any a repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." Only let the gifts of repentance and faith be given to any soul, there will be an end of Satan's power over them. Their chains and bars shall all give way before them: and, like Peter, they will come forth out of their prisons, as monuments of the Redeemer's power, and as witnesses for him to an ungodly world — — —]

Let me offer two REQUESTS:

1. Acknowledge your state to be as God has described it—

[It is so, whether ye will acknowledge it or not — — — And, O submit no longer to such a degrading vassalage. Awake from your intoxication, and contemplate the issue of your present bondage — — — And may God of his mercy overcome the resistance which you have hitherto made to our ministrations, and turn you, even by our feeble efforts, "from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God!"]

2. Unite your own efforts with ours, for your deliverance—

[There must be a concurrence on your part for your ultimate deliverance. *We* cannot effect it: and God *will not*,

without your own cordial co-operation. Doubtless it is he that must give you both to will and to do: but still you must “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Though you are “drawn by God, and made willing by him in the day of his power,” you are “drawn by *the cords of a man*,” and from thenceforth act as willingly as ever you did in the ways of sin. Arise then to the work of repentance, and to an open acknowledgment of the truth: so shall your chains be broken, and “Satan himself be bruised under your feet shortly.”]

MMCCLI.

SELF-LOVE REPROBATED.

2 Tim. iii. 1, 2. *This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves.*

THERE is in the inspired writings frequent mention of what will take place “in the last days.” But in these words very different and distant periods are referred to. Sometimes they designate the time of the Christian dispensation^a; sometimes the day of judgment^b; and sometimes, as in our text, a season between these, when very great and important changes will take place in the Church of Christ^c. Immensely important changes have already taken place, as in the successful efforts of Antichrist, both in the Mahomedan and Popish powers: and still further changes we look for in their overthrow. But it is remarkable, that every event predicted, as to take place at these distant periods, actually commenced in the apostolic age: and St. John says, “Even now are there many Antichrists^d.” As for the evil spoken of in my text, the Apostle declares, that, though predicted as to occur “in the last days,” it did exist at that very time, to a great extent^e; and that, when it should prevail in the way that he described, very perilous and troublesome times would have arrived.

^a Heb. i. 2.

^b Jam. v. 3.

^c 2 Pet. iii. 3.

^d 1 John ii. 18.

^e ver. 6—9.

For the elucidation of the subject before us, I will endeavour to shew,

I. What is the disposition here reprobated—

It is self-love: "Men shall be lovers of their own selves." But we are not to imagine that every kind and degree of self-love is sinful. On the contrary, the desire which God has infused into the soul of every man to promote his own welfare, is proposed by God himself as a standard, agreeably to which we are to regulate our love to our neighbour: he calls it "a royal law," as being established by himself; and he declares, that, in accommodating ourselves to it and "*loving our neighbour as ourselves*, we do well^f." Nay, more; our blessed Lord compares with it the love which he himself bears to his own Church and people: "No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth, and cherisheth it, *even as the Lord the Church^g*." Still, however, when it becomes inordinate, it is a very hateful disposition, evil in itself, and abominable in the sight of God. Self-love is *then* sinful,

1. When it induces a forgetfulness of God—

[God should be acknowledged by us as the only source of all good; for "from him proceedeth every good and perfect gift^h:" and for his glory should every thing be done; as it is said, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of Godⁱ." But self-love robs him in both these respects: it leads men to ascribe their success of every kind to their own wisdom and power; and at the same time to seek their own gratification only in the enjoyment of all that they possess. Now what can be more hateful, than for a man to be "sacrificing to his own net, and burning incense to his own drag^k," when he should be adoring God for the mercies vouchsafed unto him? or what more abominable, than for a man to be "living to himself," when he should be consecrating all his powers to the service of his Creator and Redeemer^l? In fact, what is this, but to idolize ourselves, and to put ourselves in the very place of God? Covetousness and sensuality are expressly called idolatry^m: yet are these but branches proceeding from the root of inordinate self-love; which is

^f Jam. ii. 8.

^g Eph. v. 29.

^h Jam. i. 17.

ⁱ 1 Cor. x. 31.

^k Hab. i. 16. 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^l Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

^m Phil. iii. 19. Col. iii. 5.

nothing less than practical atheism, or a “banishing of God from all our thoughtsⁿ.”]

2. When it operates to the injury of our neighbour—

[Our neighbour, in his place, has claims upon us, no less than God himself. Whoever we be, whether of high or low degree, what are we but members of one great family; yea, and members too of one body^o? Now, in a body, no member is to consult its own separate interest at the expense of others, but every one to seek its own happiness in the welfare of the whole^p. But self-love banishes all these considerations, and sets aside every obligation arising from them. Now, we are told, from authority, that whatever a man may possess, or whatever he may either do or suffer in the service of the Lord, “if he have not charity” towards his neighbour, so as to render unto *him* his dues, “he is no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal^q.” Whatever he may pretend, “his faith is dead;” his love is hypocritical^r; his “religion is vain^s.”]

Lamentable are those times, and pitiable that society, where this disposition reigns. Consider, I pray you,

II. The danger attendant on it—

Consider the danger,

1. To those who are under its influence—

[There is no evil which will not find a ready access to their minds; nor is there any situation in which they will not betray their selfish propensities. Whether in civil or social life, they will render themselves hated and despised. Towards the state, they will be always full of murmurs and complaints. And, in their intercourse with their families and neighbours, they will be occasions of pain to all around them. They will be displeased with every person that stands in any respect in competition with them; and will quarrel with every thing that militates in the least degree against their favourite propensity. In all their transactions in business they will be straining to gain some undue advantage, and will make the minutest differences subjects for dispute. See what the Apostle connects with this character: “Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers,

ⁿ Ps. x. 4. and xiv. 1. ^o 1 Cor. xii. 20. ^p 1 Cor. xii. 25, 26.

^q 1 Cor. xiii. 1.

^r Jam. ii. 15—17. ^s Jam. i. 26.

false-accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." It is not necessary, indeed, that all these evil qualities should be combined in the same person: but there is in self-love a tendency to produce them, so far as a person's circumstances are calculated to call them forth. Nor will there be found in such persons any redeeming quality, or any thing to compensate for these evil dispositions. Their selfishness so engrosses their minds, as to render them incapable of any noble exertion, either in a way of piety or benevolence. The lover of *self* will love none else, at least not in such a degree as to make any great sacrifice either for God or man.]

2. To the cause of Christ in the world—

[It is granted, that a man who is "a lover of his own self" may be instructed in the truths of religion, and observant of its forms: "He may have a form of godliness; but he will be destitute of its power:" nor is there any great hope of ever benefitting him by the ministration of the Gospel. The word preached either sinks not into his mind at all, or, if sown in his heart, is "choked with thorns and briers, so as to bring forth no fruit to perfection." Nor is this all the evil that accrues from his hateful dispositions. He sets others against the Gospel; and "causes the way of truth to be evil spoken of," and "the very name of God to be blasphemed." Besides, by his spirit and conduct he stirs up corruption in all around him; and even foments in them, by re-action, the very dispositions exercised by himself. Hence, instead of unity in the Church, there will be dissension; and the minister will derive nothing but grief from those over whom he ought rather to rejoice. This I apprehend to be the primary idea in the Apostle's mind, when he calls the times, of which he speaks, "perilous," that is, troublesome, grievous, and perplexing. And certainly it must go ill with any Church where such characters abound.]

We may SEE, then, What is mainly to be looked to,

1. In estimating our own character—

[I would not undervalue religious *sentiments*: but they are of no worth, if they be not productive of suitable *dispositions and conduct*. Do not then inquire, whether you have attained a scriptural creed, and "a form of godliness;" but whether "the truth has made you free;" free from selfish principles and selfish habits. The man whose heart is right with God will account nothing of any value, any further than it can be improved for the honour of God and the good of man. Even life itself is held by him only as a victim ready to be sacrificed, whenever a proper occasion shall call for it. See how the

Apostle Paul acted: he accounted not his life dear to him: on the contrary, if called to lay it down for his brethren, he regarded it as an occasion, not of grief, but of joy^t. Ah! brethren, see how much you have acquired of that spirit; and how much you possess of “the mind that was in Christ Jesus, who, when possessed of all the glory and felicity of heaven, emptied himself of it all for you; and for your benefit became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross^u.” *Self* has by nature wholly occupied your minds. The proper effect of the Gospel is, to root out that hateful quality, and to fill your souls with love both to God and man. Let this, then, serve you as a test whereby to try your state; and assure yourselves, brethren, that a work of grace is no further wrought within you than this great change is accomplished.]

2. In selecting our companions and friends—

[St. Paul guards you particularly on this head: “Men will be lovers of their own selves . . . FROM SUCH TURN AWAY^x.” So say I, my brethren: “*From such turn away.*” You can get no good from such men; nor can you hope to do any good to them: and your whole intercourse with them will be productive only of pain. As Solomon says, “Make no friendship with an angry man, lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul^y,” so I would say in reference to a selfish man. He only will be a source of comfort and benefit to you, who is divested of self, and who lives for God, and lays himself out for the good of man. That is an honourable character, worthy to be esteemed; and an useful character, from whom you may hope to derive much benefit; and a blessed character, with whom you may hope to spend a happy eternity. If thou find such an one, take him to thy bosom: and congratulate thyself, that, in this poor vain world, God has raised up to thee such a treasure as this, that may well be dear to thee even as thine own soul.]

^t Phil. ii. 17, 18.

^u Phil. ii. 5—8.

^x ver. 5.

^y Prov. xxii. 24, 25.

MMCCCLII.

FORM AND POWER OF GODLINESS.

2 Tim. iii. 5. *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*

THERE were, even in the Apostolic ages, many awful declensions from piety and sound religion: but in the last days we expect they will prevail to a far

greater extent. Even at the present day, a thorough acquaintance with what is called the religious world will bring to our minds many sad characters, who do not indeed fully answer to the description given in the preceding context, but in many respects approximate to it. It is not, however, my intention to take the whole of the character here portrayed; but only the last trait of it, which I have selected for our consideration at this time.

Let me, then,

I. Unfold the character that is here drawn—

They “have a form of godliness”—

[By “godliness,” I understand an entire devotion of the soul to God. This must, of necessity, have forms and services wherein it must display itself: for, circumstanced as we are in the world, it is impossible to serve God without forms. The reading of the Scriptures, the attending on divine ordinances, the observance of the Sabbath, the duties of family worship, and of secret prayer, are all forms, in and by which vital godliness must display itself. Now many have, in these respects, the form of godliness: they live in the external discharge of these duties: they are conscious, that without an observance of these things they could have no credit whatever for true godliness; and therefore they fulfil their duties in these respects; and then flatter themselves that they have performed all that is required of them — — —]

But they deny its power—

[As for real delight in God, notwithstanding all their profession of religion, they are strangers to it. Their prayers are a mere service of the lip and knee; their praises are no other than cold, unmeaning acknowledgments; and the whole service of God, in the Church, the family, and the closet, is nothing but “a form,” a lamp without oil, a body without the soul. Nor does godliness pervade their souls, so as to produce the mind that was in Christ, or to transform them into God’s image. They seem not to think that religion is to operate to such an extent as this; and that, provided they observe the outward duties of religion, the tempers and dispositions of the soul may safely be overlooked. Hence their self-love, their covetousness, and their numberless evil dispositions, retain their full ascendancy, and reign without controul. In fact, “they have a name to live; but in reality they are dead.”]

And now let me,

II. Shew in what estimation it should be held—

The Apostle says, "From such turn away." To explain this, I will shew,

1. In what sense we are *not* to turn away from such characters—

[We are not to turn away from them in *contempt*. *That* were highly unbecoming us; who, if we differ at all, owe the whole of that difference to the distinguishing grace of God. And it would be most offensive to God, who cannot endure such hateful pride. If we say to any man, "Stand off; I am holier than thou;" God will regard us as "a smoke in his nose, a fire that burneth all the day"^a — — — Nor are we to turn away in *indifference*, as though we cared not what became of them. We should rather mourn over them, as Paul^b; and weep over them, as our Lord did over the murderous Jerusalem — — — Nor should we turn away from them in *despair*; for God is able to save them; and he will hear prayer in their behalf — — —]

2. In what sense we are to turn away from them—

[We are not, on any account, to make them our companions. We should in this respect turn away from them, for *their sake*, for *our own sake*, for *the Church's sake*, and for *the world's sake*. If we associate with them, we shall make them think well of themselves; when, by a becoming departure from them, we may bring them to a measure of self-diffidence and compunction — — — If we associate with them, we shall be in danger of drinking into their spirit, and of learning their ways. We shall have our zeal and ardour damped by them; who, instead of rising with us, would soon bring us down to a level with themselves — — — By associating with them, also, we should lead our weaker brethren to conceive that there is no evil in their ways — — — And we should justify the world in all their censures of religion, when, for the sake of some ungodly professors, they decry all serious religion, and represent all the servants of God as hypocrites — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have not even the form of godliness—

[It is a lamentable truth, that the greater part of nominal Christians live altogether "without God in the world." Had they been born Pagans or Mahomedans, they would not, as far as Jehovah is concerned, have differed in any essential particular. Now then, I ask, if they who have a form of

^a Isai. lxxv. 5.

^b Rom. ix. 1, 2.

godliness may yet be in a state so hateful to God, what must be the condition of those who are destitute even of the form? Can it be that they should be approved of the Lord? They will indeed, and with great confidence too, affirm, that they have no ground to fear: but they awfully deceive their own souls: for to them does that declaration of God belong, in its utmost force, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God." O that they would be wise, and consider their latter end, ere it be too late!]

2. Those who have the form, but not the power—

[To what purpose is it that you "profess to know God, if in works you deny him?" In truth, if you will look into the Scriptures, you will find that real godliness is a far different thing from what you are accustomed to think it. Look at the *precepts*: do they extend only to forms? Examine the *promises*; are they limited to forms? See the *examples* of piety: do they rise no higher than to mere formal services? The whole of God's blessed word declares, that God must "be worshipped in Spirit and in truth;" and that the heart, the whole heart, must be consecrated to his service. Any thing short of this is a mere mockery, and a fatal delusion.]

3. Those who have both the form and power of godliness—

[It is well to combine the two, yet to keep them both in their proper place. We must not elevate either, to the exclusion of the other. As we must not rest in forms, so neither must we rise above them, as though the eminence of our piety superseded the use of them. All external duties, of whatever kind, must be observed: only we must take care that we be filled with the Spirit, in the use of them. Forms are like Jacob's ladder, by which you are to ascend to God, and God will descend to you. But see to it, that your access to God be daily more near, and your enjoyment of him more sweet: see to it, that you shew forth daily, with increasing evidence, the efficacy of his grace, and the beauty of his religion. Let your whole spirit and temper evince the power of godliness in your souls; and then not only shall all the saints turn *unto* you in love, but God himself will embrace you as the objects of his tenderest affection.]

MMCCCLIII.

A WANT OF PROFITING BY THE GOSPEL, CENSURED.

2 Tim. iii. 7. *Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

FROM what we know of the excellency of the Gospel, we should naturally conclude that it can never produce any thing but good. *And this is true.* But, as the law, notwithstanding it is good, is sometimes, through the corruption of our nature, an *occasion* of evil^a, so the Gospel often gives *occasion* to the corruptions of our hearts to manifest themselves to a very awful extent. Who, for instance, would imagine that persons calling themselves Christians should be obnoxious to the charge brought against them in all the preceding context^b, and answer in any degree to the character there drawn? Yet is it a melancholy fact, that *some* did answer to that character, even in the apostolic age; and, at different periods of the Church, multitudes have fully corresponded with the description there given; yea, and not only corresponded with it themselves, but laboured also with zeal and industry to infuse into others the same malignant spirit, and taken advantage of those who were less instructed, or more easily wrought upon, to propagate it to the utmost of their power. There is reason for thankfulness, that the Christian Church is not much agitated by such turbulent and unchristian teachers at this time: but still the spirit exists to a considerable extent amongst some classes of Christians; who, whilst they are running after every new preacher, exactly answer to the character here given of them, “Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

To counteract this great evil, I will endeavour to shew,

I. What little improvement many make of the Gospel which they hear—

^a Rom. vii. 5, 8—13.^b ver. 1—7.

The Gospel, in this age, has acquired a considerable degree of popularity; so that, wherever it is preached, it is attended by multitudes who previously had shewn no regard whatever for religion: yea, to such a degree does it interest many, that their whole souls appear to be engaged in an attention to it. Yet of these, not a few may be characterized by the words before us: they are "ever learning," losing no opportunity, whether in public or in private, of gratifying their thirst for spiritual instruction, and "yet never able to come to the knowledge of the truth," either in principle or in practice.

1. In principle—

[Of those who indulge a spirit of scepticism, and who make all that they hear an occasion for calling in question the truth of God, it is not my intention to speak. The persons alluded to in my text are rather those who take partial views of the Gospel; insisting on some particular truth, to the exclusion of many others; or espousing some great error, to the utter subversion of the whole Gospel. Such are they who deny the corruption of human nature, the necessity of an atonement, the divinity of our blessed Lord, and the influences of the Holy Spirit. Persons of this description find pleasure in nothing which does not foster their heretical opinions: and to diffuse their principles is as much their labour, as it was the labour of the Pharisees of old; who "compassed sea and land to make one proselyte," whom, by their hostility to the truth, they reduced to a still more abject condition than themselves.

Nor are Antinomian heretics less zealous, or less pernicious, than they. They can hear of nothing, and talk of nothing, but God's decrees; whilst all the fruits of Christianity upon the spirit and temper are as much overlooked as if they were of no importance whatever to the soul.

But, not to speak of those who magnify any peculiar tenet to the neglect or exclusion of other truths, a great multitude of those who hear the Gospel get only a vague and indistinct view of it; discerning nothing of its transcendent excellency, as displaying the glory of the Divine perfections, or as suiting the necessities of fallen man: so that, amidst all their zeal for the Gospel, they never get their souls duly impressed with it as "the wisdom of God in a mystery," or "the power of God unto salvation." I grant that a truly correct and systematic view of Christianity is not to be expected of those who are altogether illiterate, and whose opportunities of investigating

truth are very contracted : but still, the crude notions which many form of it clearly prove that they have never received the Gospel aright ; because, if they had really been taught of God, they could not but discern its fundamental truths ; since, “ what God has hid from the wise and prudent, he does clearly and most intelligibly reveal to babes.”]

2. In practice—

[Truly it is very humiliating to see how little the preached Gospel answers the end for which it is delivered. It is intended to transform men into “ the image of their God in righteousness and true holiness :” but on how few does it produce this saving change ! Many love the preaching of the truth, like Ezekiel’s hearers, who heard him with delight, “ as one that played well upon a musical instrument :” but, like them, they still retain all their former lusts ; “ their heart goes after their covetousness” and worldly-mindedness as much as ever ; and their tempers are as unsubdued as ever. See them year after year ; their besetting sins are still their besetting sins, with very little, if any, diminution in their power and ascendancy. It is painful to think how many satisfy themselves with embracing the doctrines of Christianity, without experiencing its sanctifying effects. Would to God there were no room for this complaint ! but indeed it is so : and there are many professors of religion who are as much under the dominion of unhallowed tempers as if they were utter strangers to divine truth : and, in speaking peace to themselves, they fearfully “ deceive their own souls :” for, whatever they may think, “ their religion is altogether vain^c.”

But there are others, who, though not left under the dominion of any particular sin, are still obnoxious to the censure in my text ; because they never attain that knowledge of the truth which would introduce them into the full liberty of the children of God. They have heard and learned of *men* : but they have never “ heard and learned of the *Father*, as *the truth is in Jesus*^d.” See what the truth is, as it was revealed by the Lord Jesus, and as exemplified in his life and conversation : such is that which we also ought to receive and experience : and it is a shame to us, if, after having been instructed in the Gospel for months and years, we do not, in some good measure at least, attain unto it. But many, “ who, for the time that they have been instructed, ought to have been capable of instructing others, yet need again to be initiated into the very first principles of the oracles of God^e,” and “ to be fed with milk, rather than with meat^f,” which their feeble powers are not able to digest.]

^c Jam. i. 26.

^d Eph. iv. 20, 21. John vi. 45.

^e Heb. v. 12—14.

^f 1 Cor. iii. 1—4.

Let me, then, go on to shew,

II. Whence their want of proficiency proceeds—

Many more reasons might be assigned for it than we shall have time to notice. All the different classes which we have mentioned may trace their ignorance to causes in some respect peculiar to the class to which they belong. On the other hand, there are some causes common to them all, which therefore it will be more proper for me to specify.

Men come not to the knowledge of the truth,

1. Because the obstacles to knowledge are not removed from their minds—

[The love of this world, and of the things thereof, casts a thick veil over the human mind, and incapacitates it for the reception of divine truth. It is like a film over the eyes, which either distorts objects, or renders the vision of them very indistinct. Our blessed Lord says, “How can ye believe who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh of God only?” In the parable of the Sower, the cares and pleasures of life are represented as choking the word, and rendering it unfruitful^h: and, till the ground has been in a measure cleared from thorns and briers, it is in vain to hope that any instruction can avail for the renovation and salvation of the soul.]

2. Because the means of attaining it are only partially used—

[Men will hear the Gospel with an almost insatiable avidity: but if you follow them to their own homes, you will not find them meditating upon what they have heard, with an application of it to their own souls; nor praying to God to render it effectual for the ends for which it has been delivered. When they have heard the word, they think they have done their duty: but meditation and prayer are not a whit less necessary for the improvement of the mind, than either written or oral instruction. This is particularly noticed by Solomon, who tells us, that we must add prayer to study; and not only search, but “lift up our voice for understanding,” if ever we would attain itⁱ: and if we will not use every effort to improve what we have heard, it is no wonder that the instruction we have received fails of conveying any saving benefit to our souls.]

^g John v. 44.

^h Matt. xiii. 22.

ⁱ Prov. ii. 1—6.

3. Because the knowledge acquired is not conscientiously improved—

[Men, under the word, are made to see their own faces in a glass: but, having no desire to comply with its requisitions, they soon “forget what manner of persons they are^k.” If they would follow the instruction which they receive, and take it as a light to search the inmost recesses of their souls, and as a touchstone whereby to try their experience before God, what progress would they make in the divine life! How clear would their views become! how eminent their attainments! But they hear not for this end. The Gospel is not contemplated by them in this view. The ordinances are attended by them more for the amusement of their minds than for the edification of their souls. And hence, though they are “ever learning,” they never acquire that self-knowledge that shall abase them in the dust, or that knowledge of God that shall assimilate them to his likeness.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have not yet attained the knowledge of the truth—

[Consider your responsibility for so abusing the privileges you enjoy. Were it an earthly science which you could not dive into or comprehend, you might plead your incapacity to understand the things submitted to you. But no man is too weak to comprehend divine truth, if God “open the eyes of his understanding to understand it.” Seek, then, to be taught of God; and you shall not be left in darkness. There are, indeed, two keys of knowledge, which you must obtain; and they are, integrity and contrition. Get but “a honest and good heart,” with a soul truly humbled before God; and you shall be “guided into all truth,” and “be made wise unto everlasting salvation.”]

2. Those who think they have acquired it—

[Remember, it is *not by its clearness*, but *by its efficacy*, that you are to judge of the knowledge you have acquired ——— Remember, too, that you are still to be “ever learning.” Never, in this world, will you have arrived at a full knowledge of the truth: your views of it will be increasing through all eternity. Of its sanctifying efficacy, also, you must have a progressive experience, to the latest hour of your lives. Be careful, then, that you “grow in grace, as well as in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;” so shall you, ere long, “see him as he is, and be like him for ever.”]

^k Jam. i. 23, 24.

MMCCCLIV.

CHARACTER OF ST. PAUL.

2 Tim. iii. 10. *Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience.*

IN every age of the world there have been persons adverse to the truth of God, and actively engaged in frustrating his designs for the salvation of men. In the days of Moses, Jannes and Jambres sought to harden the heart of Pharaoh: and in the apostolic age, many seducers arose to draw away from the faith those who had embraced the Gospel of Christ. Against their influence St. Paul guards his son Timothy: and that this young minister might be the better able to distinguish them, the Apostle reminds him of “all that he had heard and seen in him.”

The word which, in the text, is translated, “thou hast fully known,” is in the margin translated, “thou hast been a diligent follower of.” And from this little diversity of construction, I shall take occasion to propose to you the character of the Apostle, for your investigation, that you may “fully know it;” and for your imitation, that you may “diligently follow it.”

I propose it, then,

I. For your investigation—

Take notice, then, what was,

1. His doctrine—

[This was uniformly an exhibition of the Lord Jesus Christ, as crucified for the sins of men, and as effecting thereby our reconciliation with God — — — On this subject he maintained the utmost jealousy; suffering nothing, either in himself or others, to obscure it. When St. Peter himself had, by undue concessions, endangered the purity of this doctrine, St. Paul reprov'd him before the whole Church^a. And, if an angel from heaven had attempted to establish any doctrine in opposition to this, he was prepared to denounce him as accursed^b. All that he preached, either led to this doctrine, or

^a Gal. ii. 14.

^b Gal. i. 8, 9.

arose out of it; for “he had determined to know nothing but Christ, and him crucified.”]

2. His spirit—

[This was in perfect accordance with the doctrine which he preached. “The whole manner of his life” was regulated by it; and marked a determined “purpose” to live only for the Saviour in whom he believed, and to put forth all his powers for the propagation of the Gospel of Christ. In the discharge of this duty he had shewn the utmost “fidelity^c,” concealing nothing that could be profitable to his hearers, but boldly “declaring to them the whole counsel of God.” He knew that, “in every place, bonds and afflictions awaited him:” but “none of these things could move him:” neither counted he his life dear to him, if only he might discharge, to the satisfaction of his own conscience, the high office which had been committed to him. This was his uniform course of life, from the first moment of his conversion: and all who knew him could bear witness to it.]

3. His conduct—

[His zeal for God was duly blended with love to men. He bore with all, however weak, however ignorant, however perverse, they were: nor could the most cruel treatment divert him from his purpose. In the midst of all the injuries he sustained, he still prosecuted his labours of love with all imaginable “long-suffering, and charity, and patience;” “becoming all things to all men, if by any means he might save some;” and accounting it rather a matter of self-congratulation than of grief, if he should be called to pour forth his blood as a libation upon the sacrifice and service of his people’s faith^d. O that men would study this character, and seek to have it embodied in their own experience! For this end]

I will propose it,

II. For your imitation—

St. Paul himself says, “Be ye followers of me, as I am of Christ.” And so would I say to you, as in my text, Be diligent followers of him in the above respects.

1. Embrace his principles—

[It is observable, that the Apostle himself takes for granted that every true Christian will resemble him in his

^c This is *here* the import of the word translated “faith.”

^d Phil. ii. 17.

views of divine truth: for, having spoken of the sufferings which he had been called to endure, he adds, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." "The living godly in Christ Jesus" marks at once "his doctrine and his manner of life." "A life of faith on the Son of God" is that which characterizes every Christian under heaven. Yet it is not the faith alone which so distinguishes him, but its operation on the heart and life: it is "the living *godly* in Christ Jesus." The faith and practice must go together. If separated, they are of no value: faith is of no value, if not productive of works; and works are of no value, if not proceeding from faith. I wish this to be clearly and fully understood. In truth, there is not a person in the universe who can act up to this high standard, unless he live under the influence of faith. Nothing but a sense of redeeming love can constrain any man to such an entire surrender of his soul to God. But, on the other hand, no man who truly believes in Christ will ever stop short of it. Be ye, therefore, followers of Paul in this respect.]

2. Expect his trials—

[We are ready to think, that sufferings for righteousness' sake were the portion of the Apostles only, or of the primitive Christians: but they are, and will inevitably be, the portion of all believers; as St. Paul tells us in the words which we have just cited; "All who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Persons may be ever so wise, and ever so prudent, and ever so blameless in the whole of their conversation; but they never can escape persecution of some kind. They may not, indeed, be called to endure the sufferings inflicted on St. Paul: through the tender mercy of our God, that measure of persecution is now prevented by the laws, which afford protection to all classes of the community: but hatred, and contempt, and obloquy, will attach to all who resemble our blessed Lord, and to all who tread in the steps of the Apostle Paul. It is in vain for any one to hope that he shall be a follower of Christ without having a cross to bear: for, "if men called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household." In this respect, therefore, as well as in his religious sentiments and feelings, every one of you must prepare to resemble this bright pattern of all that was great and good.]

3. Maintain his conduct—

[Imitate *his zeal for God*: and let it be seen that you live only for God. Let your whole manner of life be consistent. Let your determined purpose be manifest: let it be evident to all, that you have but one wish, one desire. And let nothing

under heaven cause you to turn aside, even for a moment, from the path of duty. "Be steadfast, and immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord." At the same time, imitate *his love to man*. Whatever treatment you meet with in the world, be long-suffering and loving towards all; and "let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." In all this, let your conduct be so uniform, that you may appeal to those who have the nearest access to you, and opportunities of observing you at all times, that this is the constant tenour of your way. It is an easy matter to be Christians in public: but, to preserve a perfect consistency in the whole of your deportment in private, requires an unintermitted watchfulness, and a measure of grace that is possessed by few. But, indeed, I must say, that it is by such fruits alone that the goodness of the tree can be discerned. May God enable all of us so to walk, that we may be able to make our appeal, both to God and man, without fear and contradiction; and to the praise of that God who hath wrought all our good works within us!]

MMCCLV.

THE TRUE GOSPEL HATED.

2 Tim. iii. 12. *All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*

WE are apt to imagine that persecution for righteousness' sake was peculiar to the apostolic age: but St. Paul, reminding Timothy of the various trials which he himself had endured, tells him, that the Gospel would continue to give offence, wherever it was faithfully preached, or consistently professed; and that "all who would live godly in Christ Jesus should suffer persecution." Now, that we may enter into the true import of these words, and see their full scope, I will shew,

I. What is the life which is here described—

[The Apostle does not say, "All that will live godly:" for then his assertion would not be true. A conformity to the law, under which men live, will by no means give offence to those around them. Heathens, of every class and of every caste, will admire those who are most scrupulously observant of the rites prescribed by their religious system——The Pharisees were held in the highest estimation on account of

the self-denying ordinances which they practised. And papists are canonized for their penances and pilgrimages, and self-imposed austerities. Even amongst us, an exact attention to outward forms and to moral duties will gain for any man the admiration of all around him. This is not the life which will, *in the general*, expose us to persecution, whatever it may do under some particular circumstances. The life that will involve us certainly in persecution, is, “the living godly IN CHRIST JESUS;” that is, *the depending on him for all the grace whereby to serve our God, and the giving to him the glory of all that we do*. This is what the Gospel invariably requires———and this will still give the very same offence which it gave in former days. This it was which so incensed Cain against his brother Abel. Abel offered a burnt-offering as an acknowledgment of his dependence on the sacrifice of Christ, which should, in due time, be offered: and God’s attested approbation of that offering stirred up in Cain the murderous purpose to destroy his brother’s life. St. Paul, and all the rest of the Apostles, suffered on the same account^a —— And at this day, wherever that religion is professed and exemplified, the very same hatred prevails against it —— Other doctrines cause no divisions: but wherever salvation by faith in the atoning blood of Christ is proclaimed, there is a division among the people; “some saying of the preacher, He is a good man: others saying, Nay, but he deceiveth the people.”]

If this be so, it is of importance to shew, in reference to this doctrine,

II. Why it gives such universal offence—

It offends,

1. Because it is so incomprehensible in its nature—

[A preacher of Christ crucified, whilst he calls men to the performance of good works, will maintain most strenuously the impossibility of our being ever justified by them, either in whole or in part. He requires all to seek acceptance with God through *faith alone* —— Now, people in general neither do, nor can, comprehend this. If we are not to be justified by our works *in any measure or degree*, why need we perform them? —— Thus they stumble at that very stumbling-stone which offended the Jews of old, and caused them to reject the salvation which the less moral Gentiles most thankfully accepted^b ——]

2. Because it is so humiliating in its requirements—

^a 1 Tim. iv. 10.

^b Rom. ix. 30—33.

[What! must the most exemplary Pharisee, who has been "touching the righteousness of the law blameless," renounce all his own righteousness, and come down upon the very same ground with publicans and harlots, and "enter in at the strait gate" of repentance and faith, as much as the most abandoned of mankind? Who can endure to hear that, or make up his mind to comply with it? What! after having done so many things, must I seek acceptance solely through the righteousness of another imputed to me? Such views were, in the days of old, "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness:" and such will they be judged by all, who are not truly enlightened by the Spirit of God — —]

3. Because it is so exclusive in its pretensions—

[If the Apostle would have suffered circumcision to be retained by the Jews as a joint ground of hope before God, "the offence of the cross would have altogether ceased." Or if he would have suffered the name of Jesus to be enrolled among the gods of Greece and Rome, the Gentiles would have entirely renounced their opposition to him. But he required that the whole world should abandon their various grounds of hope; and trust exclusively in "the Lord Jesus Christ, as their wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." He declared, that there was no way to heaven but through Christ; and that "if an angel from heaven should preach any other doctrine than this, he must be accursed^d." This is the testimony which we also bear; and which every one who receives the Gospel must accede to. And can we wonder that this rigid and immoveable purpose should give offence? Can we wonder, that, when we require every child of man to bow to this doctrine, and inflexibly to adhere to it, even though he were menaced with death for his fidelity—we can wonder, I say, that men should rise up against us, and endeavour to extinguish the light which we set before them? It cannot be but that such authoritative demands should give offence to those who have not obtained grace to comply with them — —]

Let me then ADDRESS,

1. Those who are intimidated by the opposition made to them—

["Fear not man, who can only kill the body; but fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell." "If you will not lay down your life for Christ, you cannot be his disciples." We cannot lower those terms. Christ died, under

^c 1 Cor. i. 23.

^d Gal. i. 8, 9.

the wrath of God, for you: and it is but a small sacrifice, in comparison, that he requires you to make for him.]

2. Those who set themselves against the truth of God—

[You can never prevail, in fighting against God: or, if you prevail in any particular instance, you only aggravate so much the more your own guilt and condemnation. It were better for you to have a millstone fastened to your neck, and be cast into the depths of the sea, than that you should offend one of Christ's little ones.]

3. Those who are enabled to maintain their steadfastness in the midst of an ungodly world—

[Perhaps you have suffered somewhat for the Lord. But have you found any cause to regret it? Have not the consolations of Christ abounded above all your afflictions? You may possibly have yet more to suffer for his sake. But, for your encouragement, he has declared, that, "whilst he will deny those who deny him, he will admit all who suffer with him to reign with him in glory for ever and ever." "Be then faithful unto death; and expect assuredly, at his hands, a crown of life."]

° 2 Tim. ii. 12.

MMCLVI.

THE EARLY KNOWLEDGE OF TIMOTHY.

2 Tim. iii. 15. *From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

IN seasons of heavy trial it is of great advantage to have had a long acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures and the principles of religion. A novice is apt to be astonished, and to wonder that a change so favourable as that which he has experienced, ("from a brier to a myrtle-tree^a,") should excite nothing but enmity in those around him. But a person conversant with the word of God, and established with his grace, has counted the cost: he knows what he is to expect: he knows what others have experienced before him; and the very storms

^a Isai. lv. 13.

which threaten his existence, serve only to confirm him in the truths he has professed. In this view St. Paul encourages Timothy to hold fast the profession of his faith without wavering, and to "continue in the things he had learned," without being intimidated by persecutors, or deceived by seducers^b.

From his words we shall consider

I. The early knowledge of Timothy—

He was acquainted with the Holy Scriptures—

[By "the Holy Scriptures" we must understand, not merely *the words*, but *the doctrines*, of Scripture. Doubtless Timothy was acquainted with our fall in Adam, and the consequent depravity of our nature. He knew also the true scope of all the sacrifices as pointing to that Lamb of God who was to take away the sin of the whole world. Nor could he be ignorant of the necessity of divine influences, in order to a renovation of our hearts, and a restoration of the soul to the Divine image.

But it was not *a theoretical* knowledge even of these things which would have satisfied the mind of the Apostle: it must have been *a practical* and *experimental* knowledge of them. He must have felt and bewailed the plague of his own heart: he must have relied on Jesus as his only hope: he must have been renewed in the spirit of his mind by the power of the Holy Ghost: in short, he must have been "a new creature in Christ Jesus," or else the Apostle would never have thought his knowledge a proper ground of congratulation.]

These he knew from a child—

[It is generally thought that children are incapable of understanding the mysterious truths of the Gospel. We readily acknowledge that these truths exceed the capacity, not of children only, but of the wisest philosopher; for "the natural man cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned^c." But God can give a spiritual discernment to children, as well as to adults; and, supposing this to be given, there is nothing in the Gospel which a child may not understand as well as an adult. Children may have their affections exercised on things proper to call them forth. If God discover to them that they are sinners, and obnoxious to his wrath, they may *fear* his displeasure: if he shew them that he has provided salvation for them in Christ Jesus, they may *hope* in his mercy: if he reveal his pardoning love to their souls, they may *rejoice* in his salvation. The difficulty lies,

^b ver. 12—15.

^c 1 Cor. ii. 14.

not in feeling suitable emotions, but in having a practical conviction of those truths which are calculated to excite them. This practical conviction none but God can give; and he is as able to give it to one as to another. Indeed God does prefer those who are babes, in knowledge at least^d, and sometimes also in years; for David says, that "God had ordained strength, and perfected praise out of the mouth of babes and sucklings^e:" and our blessed Lord made it a matter of joy and thanksgiving, that his heavenly Father had "hid divine things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes^f." Do we desire instances of early conversion? Josiah sought the Lord at eight years of age^g. Samuel was devoted to him at a still earlier period of life^h. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's wombⁱ. But, if there were no other instance upon record, it would be sufficient that we are told, that Timothy knew the Holy Scriptures "*from a child*."

We shall, with the Apostle, congratulate Timothy, if we consider,

II. The excellency of that knowledge—

It was "able to make him wise"—

[Wisdom is that which is most of all coveted, and for the attainment of which no expense or trouble are accounted too great. Now the wisdom contained in the inspired volume infinitely surpasses all that can be collected from other books. It shews us what we were in our original formation, and what we now are. It shews us wherein the chief good consists, and how we may attain it. It shews us every thing, whether good or evil, in its true light, and enables us to form the very same judgment respecting it that God himself does. It teaches us how to fill every station and relation of life to the greatest possible advantage. It even draws aside the veil of heaven itself, and exhibits to us God in all his glorious perfections. It reveals to us the three persons of the Godhead, co-operating in the work of man's salvation, and executing distinct offices for our eternal good. What is all the boasted wisdom of philosophers, when compared with this?]

It was able to make him "wise unto salvation"—

[All wisdom that stops short of this is only splendid folly. How vain will the wisdom of philosophers or statesmen appear, when once we are entered into the eternal world! Nothing

^d 1 Cor. i. 26—28.

^e Ps. viii. 2. with Matt. xxi. 16.

^f Matt. xi. 25.

^g 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3.

^h 1 Sam. ii. 18, 26.

ⁱ Luke i. 15.

will then be of any value, but that which led us to the enjoyment of God, and to a meetness for glory. Then the excellency of Scripture knowledge will appear in all its brightness.

But it must be inquired, How is it that the Scripture effects this? Is there any thing meritorious in the knowledge of its truths; or any thing which by its own power can save the soul? The text informs us respecting these things, and points out the precise way in which the Scriptures make us wise unto salvation. Christ is the only Saviour of sinful man. His obedience unto death is the only ground of our hope.

But how are we to be interested in him? There is but one way; and that is, by faith. "He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life."

From hence then it may be seen how the Scriptures make us wise unto salvation. They reveal Christ to us as the Saviour of the world. They commend him to us under every image that can convey an idea of his suitableness to our wants, and his sufficiency for our necessities. They hold forth the promises of God to those who believe in Christ; and encourage us by every possible argument to rely upon him. In this manner they work faith in our hearts: and by that faith we become interested in all that Christ has done and suffered for us.

Thus, in ascribing our salvation to the knowledge of the Scriptures, we do not derogate from the honour of Christ; since it is only by revealing his work and offices to us, and by leading us to depend upon him, that they become effectual for this blessed end. But at the same time we put an honour on the Scriptures, to which no other book has the smallest claim. Other books may be channels for conveying divine knowledge; but the Bible alone is the fountain from which it flows. The knowledge therefore of the Bible is of supreme excellence; and the earliest possible attainment of it is of unrivalled importance.]

This being a very instructive record, I propose to shew,

III. The instruction which his attainment of it conveys to us—

Surely it affords us matter

1. For inquiry respecting ourselves—

[I ask not, whether the same thing can be affirmed of you, as having taken place from your early childhood; but whether it is true concerning you at this moment? Do you know the Holy Scriptures, and the great leading doctrines contained in them? Do you know them *practically* and *experimentally*, so as really to feel your lost and undone

state — — — and to be fleeing to Christ as your only refuge — — — and to be devoting yourselves to him as his redeemed people? Have you in relation to these things the very mind of God, bringing you into a conformity to his blessed will? — — — Possess what ye may, you have not attained to true wisdom, if you possess not this state of mind. No other wisdom than this will avail to your salvation: and, if you lack this, you will, to all eternity, lament and bewail your folly. I entreat you then to examine carefully whether ye be “living a life of faith in the Son of God, who has loved you and given himself for you?” Is your daily walk with God such, that the Apostle Paul would pronounce with confidence respecting you the testimony which he thus confidently bare to his beloved Timothy? Dear brethren, I beseech you, “prove your own selves;” and pray God to set his seal to the truth of this change as wrought in you, and as exemplified in the whole of your life and conversation!]

2. For direction respecting others—

[Parents, does not this record speak forcibly to you? Here you have an evidence that children are capable of receiving all the blessings of salvation, supposing they be taught by you, and taught of God also. Without the Divine blessing, even Paul might plant, and Apollos water, in vain: but the labours of a Lois and an Eunice^k shall not be lost, if God be pleased to accompany them with his Holy Spirit to the soul. Remember, a responsibility attaches to you for their souls, similar to that which belongs to your minister in reference to your souls. I pray God, that your children may not have to reproach you in the day of judgment, and to trace it to you, that they were left to perish for lack of knowledge.

And, young people, tell me whether you do not envy Timothy the distinction here given him? Have you not in your own consciences a conviction, that *his* was true wisdom, and that in attaining the knowledge of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, you best answer the end of your being. Lose not then the present opportunity, before the cares and pleasures of life have hardened your hearts, and seared your consciences as with a hot iron.

To people of every age this record speaks forcibly, and says, Labour by all possible means to convey to those around you this knowledge which proved so great a blessing to this happy youth¹ — — —]

^k 2 Tim. i. 6.

¹ If this be delivered as a Sermon for *Missions*, or for *Charity Schools*, or *Sunday Schools*, or *Infant Schools*, an appropriate line of Exhortation must be here added, to shew what *has been done*, or *may be done*, and how richly *success in one single instance will repay* for all the efforts that can be used.

MMCLVII.

THE EXCELLENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

LITTLE do men in general think how much they are indebted to God for the possession of the Holy Scriptures. This was the exclusive privilege of the Jewish nation for fifteen hundred years: and it elevated them above all other people upon the face of the earth. Their chief advantage, as St. Paul tells us, was, that “unto them were committed the Oracles of God.” In the knowledge of these Timothy was early instructed; and “by these he was made wise unto salvation.” Doubtless the way of salvation was not so clearly marked in them, as in the Christian Scriptures: but still, to any one who reads the writings of Moses and the Prophets with humility and prayer, there was every needful instruction both in relation to faith and practice. The whole Mosaic dispensation taught him this great lesson, that he must be saved by a vicarious sacrifice; and all the prophets directed his views to that great sacrifice, which should, in due time, be offered by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is of these Scriptures that St. Paul speaks in my text; and in the commendation which he bestows upon them, we see,

I. Their true origin—

The Scriptures of the Old Testament were “given by inspiration of God”—

[Of this there is abundant evidence, in the very nature of the things which they contain. What could Moses have known about the creation of the world, of the fall of man, and of the facts relating to the deluge, if they had not been revealed to him by God? What could he have known of the nature and perfections of God; or of the means by which fallen man was to be restored to his favour; or of the Prophet who should in due time be raised up from amongst his brethren, to be, like him, a Mediator, a Lawgiver, a Redeemer, a Governor? How

could he have ever given so perfect a code of laws as those contained in the Ten Commandments; and so complicated a system of ceremonial laws, that should shadow forth, in every particular, the work and offices of the Messiah, together with the privileges and enjoyments of his redeemed people? Or if we suppose a finite creature endued with wisdom sufficient for such a work (which yet cannot for a moment be imagined), it cannot be conceived that he should impose his own inventions on the world as a revelation from God: for if he was a good man, he would never have attempted so impiously to deceive the world; nor, if he was wicked enough to execute so criminal a project, would he ever have given so holy a law, which condemned even the smallest approach to such impiety, and gave the perpetrator of it no hope of ever escaping the wrathful indignation of Almighty God. The miracles wrought by him are a farther confirmation of his divine mission, and of his being inspired of God to declare all which has been transmitted to us in his writings.

Respecting the prophets also, we may say, that their inspiration of God can admit of no doubt; since it was not possible for them, if uninspired, so minutely and harmoniously to foretell so many events, which all came to pass agreeably to their predictions.]

The same may be said in reference to the writers of the New Testament—

[Whilst the Apostles and Evangelists always refer to the Old Testament as inspired of God, and declare, with one consent, that the writers of it delivered not mere sentiments of their own, but “spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost^a,” they profess to be themselves inspired by that same Spirit, in all that they declare; and they wrought miracles without number in confirmation of their word. In what they wrote indeed, they expressed themselves, each in his own peculiar style, as any other writers would have done: but in *the matter* of what they wrote, they were inspired of God; and in *the manner* of expressing it they were preserved by that same Spirit from any error or mistake. So that of the whole Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, we may affirm, that God is the Author of them, and that every part of them has been “given by inspiration from him.”]

The Apostle proceeds to declare,

II. Their primary use—

This is expressed in four different terms; which

^a 2 Pet. i. 19—21.

yet may properly be comprehended in two. The Scriptures are profitable,

1. For the establishment of sound doctrine—

[They declare all that is needful for us to know: and they lay down every “doctrine” of our holy religion with the utmost precision. At the same time, they enable us to “reprove,” or, as the word imports, to *refute*, by the most convincing mode of argumentation, every error, which ignorant or conceited men may labour to maintain. There is such a perfect unity in the system of revelation, that you cannot overthrow one part, without overturning the whole. Let the divinity of our Lord and Saviour be denied, and you entirely destroy the doctrine of the atonement also. Let the influences of the Holy Spirit be denied, and the transformation of the soul into the Divine image must fall with it. Let the merit of good works be maintained, and the whole covenant of grace is annihilated. There are indeed matters of less moment, which are less clearly revealed, and respecting which persons of equal piety may differ: but in every thing which is of fundamental importance, we find in the Scriptures the most abundant means of discovering truth, and of refuting error. To them we must on all occasions make our appeal, and by their testimony we must abide.]

2. For the securing of a holy practice—

[Innumerable evils obtain in the world: but every one of them is condemned in the inspired volume; whilst, at the same time, the ways of true piety are pointed out with clearness to all who desire to walk in them. There is not so much as a secret evil of the heart which does not find “correction” there, nor any attainment of true righteousness in relation to which we do not find the most explicit “instruction.” The works of the flesh, and the fruits of the Spirit, are set in contrast with each other, and are portrayed with such exactness, that there is no room left for ignorance to any one who will search the Scriptures, nor for mistake to any one that is truly upright before God.]

From these immediate uses we may easily discern,

III. Their ultimate design—

To render men “perfect,” is the great object of God, in all that he has revealed: and *this* the Scriptures are admirably calculated to effect; since they leave nothing wanting, either to ministers or others,

1. For their instruction—

[We cannot conceive of any good work which a person instructed out of the Holy Scriptures is not fitted to perform. Take him as “a man of God,” discharging the ministerial office: he may learn from the Scriptures how to demean himself in the Church of God so wisely and so profitably, that nothing shall be wanting to the edification of his flock. Or, take him as a private individual: take him *in his secret walk with God*: What needs he more than is there contained? What can any man add to the directions there given, or to the examples that are there set before us? or what further light can any creature in the universe desire? Take him *in his conduct towards his fellow-creatures*: What duty is there which is undefined? Let a person occupy any station, or sustain any relation of life, husband or wife, parent or child, master or servant, magistrate or subject, he will equally find such directions as shall leave him at no loss how to please God, or to approve himself to men.]

2. For their encouragement—

[There is not a motive capable of influencing the human mind which is not there suggested and enforced. Not only are the tremendous sanctions of heaven and hell set forth in order to work upon our hopes and fears, but all the wonders of redeeming love are there displayed in such majesty and splendour, that no person irradiated with their light can want any thing to increase their constraining influence. Besides, the promises of God contained in this blessed book are so rich, so free, so full, that nothing can be added to them: nor can a man be in any circumstances whatever, wherein suitable provision is not made for his encouragement and support; so that he is not only “furnished for every good work,” but assured of success in all that he attempts to execute: if he be called to *act*, he is “able to do all things through Christ who strengtheneth him;” or, if he be called to *suffer*, he is made “more than conqueror through Him who loved him.”]

Such then being the excellency of the Holy Scriptures, let every one of you set himself to discharge his DUTIES in relation to them—

1. Refer every thing to them as your standard—

[Rest not in the opinions of men, whoever those men may be: but bring every thing to the law and to the testimony: for, whoever they be, if they speak not according to this word, there is no light in them^b. You cannot but know, that, both

^b Isai. viii. 20.

in relation to faith and practice, the most grievous errors abound. Bring therefore your sentiments and your conduct to this test. See whether your views of yourself, and of Christ, agree with those which the Scriptures exhibit; and see whether your life, spirit, and conduct, be such as those of the Apostles were. I charge you, before God, to try yourselves by this touchstone. It is not a superficial view of these matters that will suffice. You may easily deceive yourselves; but you can never deceive God: and it is not by any standard of yours that he will try you, but by the standard of his own word. Oh! search and try your ways: "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves:" so shall you have the testimony of a good conscience now, and attain acceptance with God in the eternal world.]

2. Consult them in all things as your guide—

[Difficulties will often arise: and if you go to *man* for counsel, you will most generally be led astray; since none but those who have imbibed the spirit of the Scriptures themselves, can declare the sublime principles which they inculcate. Study then the Holy Scriptures from day to day, and *that* too with a direct view to your conduct; so that on any emergency you may have readily occurring to your mind such passages as are fitted to regulate your judgment, and to direct your paths. "Instructed by them, you will be wiser than your teachers^c," and will be enabled to "walk wisely before God in a perfect way^d."]

3. Beg of God, who has revealed them to the world, to reveal them also in your heart—

[Plain as the Scriptures are, they are yet "a sealed book" to all whose eyes have not been enlightened by the Spirit of God. The natural man, how learned soever he may be, cannot enter into their spiritual import, because he has not a spiritual discernment^e. The Apostles themselves, after all the instruction which they had received, both in public and private, from their Divine Master for above three years, yet needed to have "their understandings opened by him, that they might understand the Scriptures." So do ye need the teachings of God's Spirit, without which you will be in darkness to the latest hour of your lives. Pray then to him, as David did; "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!" Then shall you "be guided into all truth;" and find the Scriptures fully adequate to all the gracious ends for which they have been revealed.]

^c Ps. cxix. 99, 130.

^d Ps. ci. 2.

^e 1 Cor. ii. 14.

MMCLVIII.

CHARGE TO MINISTERS AND PEOPLE.

2 Tim. iv. 1, 2. *I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.*

RELIGION is a matter of far greater importance than men generally imagine. The appointment of an order of men on purpose to instruct mankind in the knowledge of it, and by all possible means to advance it in the world, is itself a proof, that, in God's estimation, it is indispensably necessary for the happiness of man. In truth, there is nothing else that is of any importance in comparison of it. How St. Paul laboured to diffuse it, is well known. And here we see how earnestly he inculcated on others the duty of labouring to the utmost to excite an attention to it, throughout all classes of the community. A more solemn charge can scarcely be conceived than that which he here gives to Timothy. The age of this pious youth might render him too diffident and timid in the discharge of his ministerial office: and therefore, in this epistle, St. Paul again gives him the solemn charge which he had repeatedly given in his former epistle^a, to acquit himself to that God who had sent him, and to that Saviour who would judge him in the last day.

In discoursing on the words before us, I shall consider,

I. The charge given^b—

“The word” is that which every minister must “preach.” He is not at liberty to amuse the people

^a 1 Tim. v. 21. and vi. 13.

^b If this were a subject *addressed to Ministers*, the first head should constitute the whole body of the Sermon; and the second head be reserved, in a way of corollary, for the conclusion of it. But, to a common audience, the present distribution is better.

with the fancies and conceits of men, but must declare simply the mind and will of God. He is sent of God for that very end. He is an ambassador from God to man, authorized to declare on what terms God will be reconciled to his rebellious subjects. And this ministry he is to discharge,

1. With assiduity—

[Day and night should he labour in his vocation, with all diligence. The priests under the law had their appointed seasons for sacrifice: but, for the ministration of the Gospel, and the advancement of the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom, no time should be deemed unseasonable. A servant of God should never lose sight of the object which he is commissioned to promote. Whether in public or in private, whether on the Sabbath or other days, whether early or late, whether in a season of peace or of the bitterest persecution, he should be alike active, and alike intent on fulfilling the will of his Divine Master. He should "be instant in season, out of season" — —]

2. With fidelity—

[In his discourse, he should adapt himself to the necessities of men, and "change his voice towards them" as occasion may require. If there be errors in the Church, he must "reprove" them, and establish the truth in opposition to them. If there be any sins committed, he must "rebuke" them; and, if need be, with sharpness and severity too, "that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed." If there be any discouraged by reason of the difficulty of their way, he must exhort and comfort them; according to that injunction of the prophet, "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees; and say to them that are of a fearful heart, Fear not; your God will come and save you^c." He is not to fear the face of man; but to address all, without respect of persons; and to declare to them the truth, "whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear^d."]]

3. With perseverance—

[He may labour long, and see but little fruit of his labour: but, "like the husbandman, he must wait with patience for the early and the latter rain^e." He must be content to give "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little." And if, in return for all his kindness, he meet with nothing but reproach and persecution, he must still persist in using his best efforts, if by any means he may at last be made

^c Isai. xxxv. 3, 4.

^d Ezek. ii. 7.

^e Jam. v. 7.

useful even to one. Confident that his "doctrine" is right, he must labour to inculcate it on all; and leave to God the issue, whether it be to blind and harden men, or to convert and save their souls^f.

All this is the bounden duty of a minister: and of his labours in it he must give account to "the Judge of quick and dead, in the great day of his appearing."]

But, that we may adapt the subject more to the edification of all, let us consider,

II. The charge implied—

It is evident, that, if such be the duties of those who preach, there must be corresponding duties attaching to those who hear. On these, therefore, the charge enjoins,

1. A due improvement of the ministry—

[If we are to "preach the word," you, my brethren, are to hear it: and to hear it too, "not as the word of man, but as the word of God," and as the word of God to your souls.

Nor are you ever to become remiss in your attention to it. It should "be daily your delight," and "more to you than your necessary food." At all times, and under all circumstances, you should look to it, as your sure directory, and your never-failing support.

Whether read in your secret chamber, or preached to you in the public assembly, your submission to it should be deep and unreserved. Every sentiment of your heart should be regulated by it; every lust should be mortified in obedience to it; and every duty performed in accordance with it. You must, in particular, guard against itching ears and a rebellious heart; neither affecting novelty on the one hand, nor quarrelling with old-established truths on the other^g.

Nor should you ever be "weary in well-doing." Whatever it may cost you to conform to God's blessed word, it must be done: nor should you ever rest, till your whole souls be cast into the very mould of the Gospel.]

2. A diligent attention to your own personal concerns—

[If ministers have their duties, so have you also yours, to which you are bound to pay all possible attention. Though you minister not in public, you should be as priests in your own houses, and perform towards your respective families all that the most faithful minister attempts for you.

^f Isai. vi. 9, 10.

^g ver. 3, 4.

But, supposing that you have none to whom you owe these friendly offices, you must at least watch over your own souls, and with all diligence and fidelity endeavour to bring them into subjection to the commands of God. You must bear in mind your responsibility to God for your every act, and word, and thought; and must so walk before your Lord and Saviour, that you may stand with boldness and confidence before him in the great day of his appearing.]

In conclusion, let me bring the "CHARGE" more directly to your hearts and consciences—

[Almighty God is here present with us, and has heard every word that has been spoken to you. The Lord Jesus Christ, too, is present with us; and records in the book of his remembrance every word that is delivered in his name. And soon will he descend from heaven, and summon the universe to his tribunal. Then will his kingdom be complete; and every member of it, from the first to the last, shall stand before him. Now, as in the immediate presence both of the Father and of the Son, I speak unto you; and in their sacred name I charge you all. You shall all, ere long, stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, and "give an account of yourselves to God;" and receive at his hands according to what you have done in the body, whether it be good or evil. It becomes you, then, to "receive with meekness every word" that is delivered, as it becomes *me* also to "speak even as the oracles of God." The Lord grant that *I* may so *speak*, and *ye* *do*, as those who shall be judged by God's perfect law^h; and that both the one and the other of us may so approve ourselves to Christ, as "not to be ashamed before him at his comingⁱ."]]

^h Jam. ii. 12.

ⁱ 1 John ii. 28.

MMCCCLIX.

A CHRISTIAN'S DYING REFLECTIONS.

2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

CHRISTIANITY adapts its comforts to every part of our existence; but its influence is peculiarly visible at the close. St. Paul, when expecting death, was not without the most comfortable reflections,

I. In his review of the past—

He had had different views of life from what are generally entertained—

[Many think they have little to do but to consult their own pleasure; but St. Paul had judged, that he had many important duties to fulfil.]

He had devoted himself to the great ends of life—

[He had maintained a warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil: he had run his race with indefatigable zeal and ardour^a: he had kept the faith with undaunted courage and constancy: he had disregarded life itself when it stood in competition with his duty^b.]

Hence the approach of death was pleasant—

[He enjoyed the testimony of a good conscience: he could adopt the language of his Lord and Master^c—he was a prisoner without repining, or wishing to escape: he was condemned, and could wait with complacency for the tyrant's stroke.]

In consequence of this, he was happy also,

II. In the prospect of what was to come—

He had long enjoyed the earnest of eternal blessings^d. He looked forward therefore now to the full possession of them—

[A crown of righteousness means a most exalted state of holiness and happiness in heaven; *nor did he doubt* but that such a reward was laid up for him.]

He did not however expect it on account of any merit in himself—

[He speaks of it indeed as bestowed in a way of “righteous” retribution; but he expected it wholly as the “gift” of God through Christ^e.]

Nor did he consider it as a gift peculiar to himself as an Apostle—

[The “longing for Christ's second coming” is a feeling common to all Christians^f. For them also is this crown of righteousness reserved^g.]

^a 1 Cor. ix. 26.

^c John xvii. 4.

^e Rom. vi. 23.

^g Heb. ix. 28.

^b Acts xx. 24. and xxi. 13.

^d Eph. i. 14.

^f 2 Pet. iii. 12.

INFER—^h

1. How does the Apostle's experience condemn the world at large—

[The generality are strangers to spiritual consolations: but there is no true religion where they are not experienced. Let all consider what would be *their* reflections, and prospects, if they were now dying: Let all live the life of the righteous, if they would die his death.]

2. How amply does God reward his faithful servants!

[Poor and imperfect are the best services that they can render: yet how different is their state from that of others, both in and after death! Let all then devote themselves entirely to God.]

^h If this were the subject of a *Funeral Sermon*, it might be improved in reference to the deceased and the survivors, to shew that the former resembled the Apostle, and to stimulate the latter to a due improvement of their time.

MMCCCLX.

APOSTASY OF DEMAS.

2 Tim. iv. 10. *Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.*

TO have our minds well established with principles, is doubtless very desirable: but in matters which are confessedly beyond the comprehension of man, we should be modest and diffident in drawing conclusions from them, lest, through an excessive zeal for one principle, we subvert others which are not less true or less important. An inattention to this rule has been productive of incalculable injury to the Church of Christ: for persons giving themselves up, as it were, to some particular sentiment, have wrested the Scriptures to make every part of them speak the same language; and have indulged in most acrimonious feelings against all who did not accord with their views. But we should remember, that there are in revelation, as in all the other works of God, depths which we cannot fathom; and that our

true wisdom is, not so much to be making the Scriptures a theatre whereon to display our controversial skill, as to deduce from them the great practical lessons which they were intended to convey. Were we, for instance, to take occasion from the passage before us to argue about the decrees of God, and the final perseverance of the saints, we might dispute well, but it would be to little profit ! but, if we enter upon the subject with fear and trembling, and with a view to our own spiritual advantage, we shall find it replete with the most valuable instruction to our souls.

Let us consider then,

I. The fact here recorded—

A more melancholy fact is scarcely to be found in all the sacred records. Let us notice,

1. The fact itself—

[Demas was a man of great eminence in the Church of Christ. St. Paul, in the salutations which usually close his epistles, twice mentions him in immediate connexion with St. Luke ; “ Salute Lucas and Demas.” In one of these places he calls Demas one of his fellow-labourers in the work of the Gospel^a: in the other, after having mentioned Demas with honour, he gives to another minister, Archippus, a most solemn warning, on account of the lukewarmness which he had manifested in the discharge of his ministry : “ Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it^b.” From hence then we conclude, that he saw no occasion for such an admonition in the case of Demas. Yet behold, we find at last, that “ Demas had forsaken him,” and gone to a great distance from him, and altogether abandoned the work in which he had been engaged. Had we been told, that this servant of Christ had *erred* in some particular, or even that he had *declined in zeal* for his Master’s cause, we should not have been so much surprised ; because we are aware that the greatest and best of men are but weak, and that there are changes in their spiritual, as well as their corporeal, health : but, when we are informed that he *forsook* the Apostle, forsook him too in his greatest extremity, when by reason of his imprisonment and approaching martyrdom he needed all possible support ; and that, in forsaking the Apostle, he forsook his Lord and Master also ; we are confounded, almost as the

^a Philem. ver. 24.

^b Col. iv. 14, 17.

Philistines were, when they saw their champion dead upon the field.

Seeing the fact, we are eager to inquire into,]

2. The occasion of it—

[Whence could this proceed? To what shall we trace an event so calamitous, so unforeseen? We are not left in doubt respecting it: the Apostle, at the same time that he announces the fact, declares the reason of it: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." Alas! alas! What did he find in this world worthy of his affections? Had he never known any thing of spiritual and eternal objects, we might account for his attachment to the things of time and sense: but we are amazed, that, after having once tasted of living waters, he could ever afterwards find satisfaction in the polluted streams of this world.

But, supposing him to love this present world; is there any thing in that to draw him from Christ, and to make him cast off all concern for his eternal interests? Yes: the love of God and of the world are incompatible with each other; inasmuch that, "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him^c." Light and darkness are not more opposed to each other than are the things of this world, and the things of God. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," what have they to do with heavenly-mindedness? "The person who liveth in pleasure, is dead whilst he liveth^d:" "the cares and indulgences of this world choke the good seed, and render it unfruitful^e:" and the seeking honour from men, instead of seeking it from God only, is absolutely incompatible with a saving faith^f. The cross of Christ, if duly valued, would crucify us unto the world, and the world to us^g.

Here then we see whence this deplorable evil proceeded. Demas had yielded to a concern about his carnal ease and interests. This gradually weakened his anxiety about his spiritual and eternal welfare. Then he became remiss in secret duties: then his strength to resist temptation declined: then his natural corruptions regained their former ascendant over him: then the Spirit of God, being grieved, and quenched, left him to himself: then he became the sport of temptation, and the prey of Satan: and then his abandonment of Christ and of his Gospel followed of course.]

Whilst we mourn over this unhappy man, and lament his apostasy, let us proceed to consider,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

^c 1 John. ii. 15.

^d 1 Tim. v. 6.

^e Matt. xiii. 22.

^f John v. 44.

^g Gal. vi. 14.

Surely we may learn from it—

1. That whatever attainments any man has made, it becomes him not to be too confident about the issue of his spiritual warfare—

[If we are upright before God, we need not give way to distressing fears: *they* are dishonourable to God, and unprofitable to ourselves. But at the same time we should guard against a presumptuous confidence: for no man knows what a day may bring forth. David, previous to his fall, if told what sins he would commit, might have replied with Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do such things?" And Peter, so far from thinking it possible that he should ever deny his Lord, was confident that nothing could ever shake his constancy. So, if Demas, when, in his better state, had been told in what it might end, he would have thought it absolutely impossible that he could ever so "make shipwreck of his faith." Shall *we* then, after seeing the failure of such men presume to say, "My mountain standeth strong, I shall not be moved?" Let us never forget, that if God withdraw his hand from us for one moment, we shall fall and perish: and let our prayer to him therefore be continually, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." To every man among you, though he were as eminent as St. Paul himself, I would say, "Be not high-minded, but fear^h." "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fallⁱ."]

2. That we must watch with all carefulness against the first beginnings of spiritual decay—

[Had Demas attended to the first encroachments of a worldly spirit, and resisted them as he ought, he had never been left to final apostasy. But the first breach being neglected, an inundation ensued; and the leak being disregarded, his vessel sank. Let me then put you all upon your guard against a decay in your spiritual affections, and an attempt to serve God with a divided heart. From the moment that you embrace the truth, and "put your hand to the Gospel plough, you must not so much as *look* back^k;" you must "forget all that is behind, and press forward to that which is before^l." O, "remember Lot's wife^m." Her sin might be thought small: but it was not so in the estimation of her God: and she is made a monument to all future generations. Be "jealous over yourselves with a godly jealousy;" and to the latest hour of your lives adopt the habit of St. Paul, who "kept under his body, and brought it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-awayⁿ."]

^h Rom. xi. 20.

ⁱ 1 Cor. x. 12.

^k Luke ix. 61, 62.

^l Phil. iii. 13.

^m Luke xvii. 32.

ⁿ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

3. That, if we have unhappily forsaken the Lord, the door of mercy is not yet closed against us—

[Of Demas we know no more than what is here spoken. But of Mark, who is also called John, and who was a companion of Paul and Barnabas in their travels, we do know. He, like Demas, forsook those holy men in a time of danger, and “went no more with them to the work^o.” But God in mercy granted him repentance unto life; so that he not only obtained mercy of the Lord, but became afterwards profitable even to St. Paul himself in the discharge of his apostolic office^p. Let not any one therefore despair. Let it be remembered, that as long as we are in the body, God addresses us in these gracious words, “Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely^q.” Be persuaded then to return to him without delay: for if you return not, “it would have been better for you never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to you^r.” But, if you return with penitential sorrow, then shall your Father’s arms be open to receive you, and every member of his family give thanks to him in your behalf.]

^o Acts xiii. 13. and xv. 38.

^p ver. 13. *the very verse after the account of unhappy Demas.*

^q Jer. iii. 22. Hos. xiv. 4.

^r 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

T I T U S.

MMCCLXI.

FALSE PROFESSORS DESCRIBED.

Tit. i. 16. *They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him.*

AT a time when the profession of godliness is everywhere abounding, it is of peculiar importance to lay down marks whereby the upright may be distinguished, and the hypocritical be put to shame. There have ever been in the Church, many, whose characters would not bear investigation, and whose conduct was the very reverse of what their profession required. In the days of the Apostle there were “many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, who subverted whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre sake^a:” and of these he hesitated not to declare, that “whilst they professed that they knew God, they in works denied him.”

Now, as such persons abound in all ages, I will enter into a fuller consideration of the character here delineated; and observe respecting it, that it is,

I. A common character—

[As all who were the natural descendants of Abraham were considered as professing the faith of Abraham, even whilst they were living altogether without God in the world; so all who name the name of Christ are considered as Christians, though they never think of departing from any iniquity which

^a ver. 10, 11.

their hearts affect. But it is not of such persons that I intend to speak. The persons mentioned in my text evidently wished to be regarded as religious: and therefore it is to persons of that description that my attention shall be confined. These, indeed, embrace a great variety of character: for, whilst some take up religion in a formal kind of way, as a means of gaining a reputation for sanctity, others vaunt themselves in an experience of its power upon their souls. Of the former class are those whom St. Paul speaks of, when he says, "Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident, that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, *which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law*^b." Of the latter class are they whose hearts have been impressed in a measure with divine truth, and brought in some degree under the power of religion, but who yet hold fast some secret lusts which they will not part with. Of such the Prophet Isaiah speaks: "They call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel^c." Of such also God speaks by the Prophet Ezekiel: "They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words; but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness^d."

Now, of both these classes there are very many in the present day. At a former period, the pharisaical class were the more numerous; but at this time the hypocritical. In some respects they differ widely from each other, and hold each other in contempt: but, in the main point, they are agreed; namely, in not walking agreeably to their profession. Neither the one nor the other give themselves up wholly to their God: some hidden abomination, like a worm at the root, impedes their fruitfulness in good works, and prevents them from "bringing forth any fruit to perfection." Were I to distinguish between them, I should say, the one profess religion generally; the others profess religion of a superior cast: but, when the whole of their spirit, and temper, and conduct, are compared with the Scripture-standard, they shew that their hearts are not right with God; and that, whilst "they draw nigh to him with their lips, their hearts are far from him^e."

It is also,

II. An awful character—

^b Rom. ii. 17—20.

^c Isai. xlviii. 2.

^d Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

^e Isai. xxxix. 13.

In two respects do these persons fearfully betray their extreme folly and wickedness :

1. They grievously dishonour God—

[In proportion as they profess a zeal for God, is God implicated, if I may so say, in the evils which they commit. Not that God has indeed any responsibility on their account : but an ungodly world, who hate religion, will take occasion to condemn religion itself for the faults of those who profess it, yea, and to “blaspheme the very name of God himself on their account.” Unreasonable as it is that “the way of truth should be evil spoken of” on account of those who walk not according to its dictates, still this is what men will do, in vindication of themselves, and for the purpose of decrying all serious godliness^f. But this greatly aggravates the guilt of those who thus expose religion to contempt, and cast a stumbling-block in the way of a perishing world. Truly it were “better that a millstone were hanged about the neck of such persons, and that they should be cast into the sea,” than that they should continue to involve themselves in such tremendous guilt.]

2. They fatally deceive their own souls—

[No persons are less disposed to suspect themselves than these. Their profession stands with them in the place of practice. They think only of what they *do* ; but never reflect on what they *leave undone*. If they “say, Lord, Lord,” it never comes into their minds to inquire how far they “do the things which he requires of them.” The godly themselves express not a greater confidence of their state before God, than these. Hence it is that they are so frequently warned against self-deceit ; “If a man think himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself^g.” And again ; “If any man seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but *deceiveth his own heart*, that man’s religion is vain^h.” Of such persons there is little, if any, hope : because they imagine themselves already possessed of all that the Gospel offers, and therefore are deaf to the invitations and entreaties which they deem applicable only to persons less favoured than themselves.]

Such an one is truly,

III. A pitiable character—

In the midst of light “they walk on still in darkness”—

^f 2 Pet. ii. 2. Rom. ii. 23, 24. 1 Tim. vi. 1.

^g Gal. vi. 3.

^h Jam. i. 26.

[Professing that they know God, they take, of course, the Scriptures for their guide: but, with respect to the real life of godliness, they are yet ignorant, because that “darkness has blinded their eyesⁱ.” In truth, they see every thing through a wrong medium, and as it were with a jaundiced eye; and the very principles which they profess serve only to beguile them to their ruin. Unhappy souls! “whose very light is darkness^k,” and whose knowledge causeth them to err^l!]

With all imaginable opportunities for salvation, they improve not any for their good—

[They have the ordinances of religion, yea, and take pleasure in them too^m; but they remain unhumbled, and “uncircumcised both in heart and life.” The very word they hear, which to others is “a savour of life unto life,” proves to them only “a savour of death unto deathⁿ.” The more formal of these characters satisfy themselves with a mere round of duties; and the more enlightened of them place their own feelings and conceits in the stead of vital godliness; and thus both the one and the other turn the very means of salvation into occasions of augmented guilt and misery. The very sun and rain, which ripen others, do but prepare them for fuel in the fire of hell^o.]

Buoyed up with the most glorious hopes and prospects, they have nothing awaiting them but the most fearful disappointment—

[They dream of heaven at the termination of their earthly pilgrimage: but, alas! what horror will seize hold upon them at the instant of their departure hence! It is not only the tree which *bears bad fruit*, but that which *bears not good fruit*, that will be cast into the fire^p: not those only who had no lamps, but “those whose lamps were destitute of oil, that will be cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth^q.” They will carry their delusive hopes even to the bar of judgment: but their claims will be disallowed, and their pleas be of no avail^r. Their eyes will then be opened to see their folly; and they will be left to reap for ever the fruit which they have sown^s.]

Let me now entreat you to INQUIRE into,

1. Your profession—

ⁱ 1 John ii. 11.

^m Isai. lviii. 2.

^p Matt. vii. 19.

^r Matt. vii. 22, 23.

^k Matt. vi. 23.

ⁿ 2 Cor. ii. 16.

^q Matt. xxv. 8—12. with Matt. viii. 12.

^s Gal. vi. 7, 8.

^l Isai. xlvii. 10.

^o Heb. vi. 7, 8.

[Think not that a merely speculative knowledge, however extensive it be, will suffice. To know God aright, you must know him, as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus; and must so know him, as to renounce every other hope, and to rely altogether on Christ alone. Then only do we know him aright, when we “cleave unto Christ with full purpose of heart.”]

2. Your practice—

[It is to little purpose that we hear and approve of the word, “unless we be doers of it also^t,” nor can we have any satisfactory evidence that we know God, except by obeying his commandments^u. See, then, that with your profession there be also a holy consistency of conduct: and take care to “shew forth your faith by your works.”]

^t Jam. i. 22—25.

^u 1 John ii. 3.

MMCLXII.

SOBER-MINDEDNESS.

Tit. ii. 6. *Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded.*

THE first object of a Christian minister is, to proclaim the Gospel of salvation, in all its freeness and in all its fulness. This is the foundation of a sinner's hope: and unless this foundation be firmly laid, it will be in vain to attempt any superstructure; since from the Gospel alone, and from Christ as revealed in it, can we obtain that strength which is necessary for the production of any good work whatever. But, when we have made known “the truth as it is in Jesus,” we must go on to inculcate holiness in all its branches; and not in general terms only, but with a special reference to every particular person whom we may have occasion to address. Titus, though but a youth, was enjoined to officiate with all the authority of a divinely-appointed minister; and to address with equal fidelity the aged and the young, on the subject of their respective duties: “Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:” exhort alike “the aged men, and aged women,” “the young women also, and the young men,” giving to each the instruction suited to his own peculiar state

and condition. To the aged men and aged women many important hints were to be offered ; as to the young women also, through the medium of the matrons. In every one of these, sobriety of mind bears a part^a : but in the instructions which he is to give to young men, it comprehends the whole ; since, if they be thoroughly imbued with that, it will form their whole character agreeably to the mind of God. I shall not, however, so confine my observations to the one sex as to overlook the other, but shall address myself indiscriminately to youth in general. And in doing this, I will,

I. Shew whence it is that young people need this particular counsel—

1. They are inexperienced as to the world—

[The world, in the eyes of youth, looks fair, and promises much happiness to those who will worship at its shrine. Its allurements are set forth on every side ; and its votaries are everywhere inviting us to participate their delights. But its choicest flowers conceal a thorn ; its sweetest draughts are impregnated with poison. Of all that it contains, there is not any thing that is capable of affording any permanent satisfaction : on every thing in it is stamped, in characters that are indelible, this humiliating inscription, “Vanity and vexation of spirit.” Over this, however, is hung a veil, which time and experience alone are, for the most part, able to remove. What wonder then is it, if youth, who see nothing but the outward garb of the world, admire its glittering vanities, and give themselves to the pursuit of its empty shadows ? What wonder, if, after having got a taste of its delusive pleasures, they suppose, of course, that the harvest will correspond with the first-fruits ? But the event never justifies the expectation. To none did the world ever yet prove a satisfying portion : and therefore, in the commencement of their course, the counsel in the text is necessary for every child of man.]

2. They are but little acquainted with their own hearts—

[They take credit to themselves for meaning well : and they do perhaps, on the whole, mean well : entertaining no deliberate purpose to offend either God or man. But they are

^a ver. 2, σώφρονας : ver. 4, σωφρονίζωσι : ver. 5, σώφρονας : ver. 6, σωφρονεῖν.

not aware how strong a bias there is within them, or through what a delusive medium they behold the things around them. Their prejudices are all in favour of the world: their passions are pleading strong for indulgence: self-denial is in its very nature painful: and, if only they keep within the bounds prescribed by custom, they can see no reason why they should debar themselves from any species of indulgence. By gratification, their dispositions, their habits, their very sentiments, are confirmed; and thus they proceed in their vain career; "calling good evil, and evil good; putting darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter^b:" in a word, whilst they feed on ashes, a deceived heart turns them aside; so that they cannot deliver their souls, or say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand^c?" How needful for them the counsel in our text is, must be obvious to every considerate mind.]

3. They are surrounded on every side with evil counsellors and vicious examples—

[The great mass of mankind are walking after the imagination of their own hearts, and not after God. Nor are they ashamed of what they do: yea, rather, they glory in their shame, and with undaunted effrontery persuade all around them to "follow their pernicious ways." The votaries of real piety, on the contrary, are few; and in their habits they affect an unobtrusive concealment. Of course, young people conceive that the great majority are right; and that those who are walking in a narrow and unfrequented path, are actuated by some vain conceit, against which it will be well to guard. The invitations too of the gay are welcome, because they meet with a congeniality of sentiment and feeling in the youthful bosom; whilst the lessons of wisdom and piety find a very reluctant admission into the soul. We need only observe how different an ear young people turn to the counsels of wisdom, and of folly, and we shall see the importance of the admonition in our text, and the necessity of "exhorting them to be sober-minded."]

Having shewn what need young people have of counsel, I will,

II. Suggest such counsel as their situation requires—

Under this head we might range through the whole field of practical wisdom, and bring forth topics which would occupy a whole volume. But we must content ourselves with a few brief hints:

^b Isai. v. 20.

^c Isai. xliv. 20.

1. Some more general—

[The first point that I would press on your attention is, to *get your souls deeply imbued with the concerns of eternity*. If the concerns of time have the ascendant in your hearts, there can be no hope of your ever being sober-minded, because your views and dispositions are radically wrong. You are immortal beings; and must never forget, that in a few more hours you will be standing at the tribunal of your Judge, and be consigned by him, for ever, either to heaven or to hell. If that be kept out of sight, every species of delusion will be harboured in the mind, and will reign without controul — — —

But it is not a general conviction that will suffice. No: you must *pray to God to guide you in every step of your way*. So “deceitful is sin,” and so “desperately wicked is the heart,” that no human care can preserve you. It is God alone that can keep the feet of his saints. Had you all the zeal of Peter, you might, in a time of trial, deny your Lord, and dissemble with your God. To your latest hour you must entreat of God to guide you; for “it is not in man that walketh to direct his paths;” and, in every step you take, you must say, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe” — — —

You must also *be diligent in studying the word of God*. There is something very imposing in the maxims of the world; and you will easily be misled by them. But the word of God must be your rule: it must be the one touchstone, by which you are to try every sentiment and every practice. You must take the sublimest precepts of Holy Writ, and set before you the brightest examples that are there exhibited: you must behold an Abraham sacrificing his only son at the command of God; and a Moses giving up all the treasures of Egypt, that he might participate affliction with the people of God. You must follow the Apostle Paul in all his diversified scenes of trial; and see what spirit he manifested, what conduct he pursued. Above all, you must contemplate your blessed Lord and Saviour in every step which he took whilst sojourning in this polluted world. It is in this way that you must attain sobriety of mind. The world will call these things enthusiasm: but, whatever the world may say or think, your wisdom is to “be conformed to Christ,” and to “walk in all things as he walked.”]

2. Others more particular—

[General rules will scarcely suffice to mark with sufficient accuracy the counsel in my text. I would therefore descend to a few particulars; and say, *Consider what becomes you in your place and station*. There are particular duties assigned to different situations: to you who are in earlier life, the

virtues of modesty, and diffidence, and submission, are of prime importance. Nothing is more hateful than conceit and waywardness in the youthful mind. The younger are especially commanded to be in subjection to the elder, and especially to those elders who are placed by God in authority over us: and, wherever there is sobriety of mind, there will be a willing obedience to all lawful authority, and a diligent performance of every appointed duty. Humility, respect, and deference to the judgment of superiors, are pre-eminently characteristic of a well-regulated mind.

I would also say, *Consider, on every occasion, what impression your conduct is likely to make on others.* This is on no account to be overlooked. An inattention to it is productive of incalculable evil. We are not at liberty to cast stumbling-blocks in the way of others. Religion of itself, however careful we may be, will be sufficiently offensive to the carnal mind, without having any thing added to it by our imprudence. We should guard, as much as possible, that "our good may not be evil spoken of:" and if, as must of necessity be the case, we are constrained in many things to act contrary to the wishes of those around us, we should seek to disarm their hostility by meekness and gentleness, and not to augment it by petulance and indiscretion.

One great help to sobriety will be, (what I would next recommend,) to *choose for your associates the prudent and discreet.* "He that walketh with wise men," says Solomon, "will be wise; but a companion of fools will be destroyed." We naturally drink into the spirit of those with whom we associate: and we are told from authority, that "evil communications will corrupt good manners." Indeed, from evil connexions the most deplorable consequences ensue. It is no uncommon thing for a man, who at first only "*walks occasionally in the counsel of the ungodly, to come ere long to stand in the way of notorious sinners, and at last to be found sitting in the seat of the scornful.*" If you would walk wisely, put away from you the light, the vain, and those who are indulging any sinful propensity; and gather round you the wise, the discreet, the holy. This will render your path incomparably more safe and easy, and will contribute to fix in you such habits as are "praise-worthy and of good report."

To this I would add yet further, *Examine your own motives and principles of action, with all possible care and diligence.* Many persuade themselves that they are doing right; whilst all but themselves see, that they are acting a very unworthy part. James and John were at one time actuated by ambition, and at another time by revenge; whilst yet they had not the smallest consciousness of deviating from the path of duty. But they "knew not what spirit they were of." And so it is

with us: we may think that we are under the influence of a religious principle; whilst, in fact, we are manifesting a temper that is truly Satanic. Let us remember this; that whatever proceeds from pride, from passion, from interest, or from any corrupt principle whatever, is wrong; and that we then only are right, when our zeal for God is blended with love to man, and when we are ready to weep over the persons whom we are constrained to offend.

Lastly, I would say, *Be open to conviction*. Diffidence becomes every child of man. A backwardness to receive reproof, or to listen to one who would point out to us a wiser path, is a strong presumptive evidence that we are wrong. We should be jealous over ourselves. We see mistake and obstinacy in others; and we should guard against them in ourselves. Our first care must be, to "prove all things," and then to "hold fast that only which is good."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are yet strangers to "sound doctrine"—

[You have at least seen, this day, that the Gospel is not, as some slanderously affirm, opposed to morality: you have seen, on the contrary, that "the grace of God which bringeth salvation teaches us to live *soberly*, righteously, and godly, in this present world^d." Do not then impute, as many do, the indiscretions of professors to the Gospel which they profess. It is not to be supposed that young people should all at once become so wise and discreet, that they shall not err in any thing. They are "of like passions with yourselves," and are in the midst of a tempting and ensnaring world; and have, moreover, deceitful hearts, and a subtle adversary ever endeavouring to turn them aside. Be not offended, then, if you do see somewhat of indiscretion in youthful professors. Ascribe it not to their religion, but their inexperience: and if you see them growing in sobriety of mind and consistency of conduct, let the honour redound to that Gospel by which they are animated; and to that God, by whose gracious influences they are instructed and upheld.

There is one danger to which the indiscretions of religious people may expose you; and that is, the confounding of coldness and indifference with sobriety of mind. Be assured, that however faulty religious professors may be in the exercise of their zeal, you can never be right in indulging a lukewarm spirit. *This* is offensive to God, and odious in the extreme. Religion requires the heart, the whole heart; nor will God

^d ver. 11, 12.

be satisfied with any thing less. I call upon you, therefore, to embrace the truth, and to walk worthy of it: and, instead of censuring the infirmities of the weak, be yourselves examples to them in every thing that becometh the Gospel of Christ.]

2. Those who desire to serve the Lord—

[Your very desires, if not duly regulated, may lead you astray. You may imagine that your duty to your God and Saviour supersede your duties to men; but it does no such thing. The duties of the second table are as binding as those of the first: only they must, *to a certain degree*, be subordinated to them. I say, *to a certain degree*; for if there be only a positive institution, the duty of love will supersede that: but, where the commands are of a moral and religious nature, there God must be obeyed, and not man. You must endeavour to make all your duties harmonize: for, most assuredly, there is no real contradiction between them; and in endeavouring to fulfil them all, you must not forget that declaration of Solomon, “I, Wisdom, dwell with Prudence.” Prudence is not that contemptible virtue which many people imagine: it calls into action much thought, and care, and self-denial, and love; and it tends, in a very high degree, to recommend the Gospel. On the exercise of it much of God’s honour depends: for imprudence will cause his ways to be evil spoken of, and “his very name to be blasphemed.” On the exercise of this, too, the eternal welfare of multitudes depends. No one knows how many might be “won by the good conversation of God’s people, who never will be won by the word.” Let this be kept in mind: you will at least cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against you; and put to silence the ignorance of foolish men;—and, who can tell? you may peradventure, by the light which shines from you, constrain many to “confess, that God is with you of a truth,” and lead them “to glorify God in the day of visitation^e.” Guard, then, against extremes of every kind; and say with David, “I will walk wisely before thee, in a perfect way^f.” Guard against extremes in austerity; extremes in fear; extremes in confidence; extremes in boldness and forwardness. There is a season for every grace, and a limit to the exercise of every grace. Your faith must be tempered with fear; your boldness, with modesty; your zeal, with love: you must have a spirit of “power, and of love, and of a *sound mind*.” You must not so tremble, as to forget that you have cause to rejoice; nor so rejoice, as to forget that you have cause to tremble: you must combine the two, and “rejoice with trembling.” In this way you will attain sobriety of mind, and “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.”]

^e 1 Pet. ii. 12.

^f Ps. ci. 2.

MMCLXIII.

THE GOSPEL PRODUCTIVE OF HOLINESS.

Tit. ii. 11—14. The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

WHEREVER Christianity has been professed, the standard of public morals has been raised : and in proportion as it has gained an ascendant over the hearts of men, it has approved itself the friend and parent of good works. That many have perverted its principles, and walked unworthy of them, is true ; but this can form no solid objection against the Gospel itself, any more than the abuse of reason or of the blessings of Providence can disprove the benefit of them when rightly used. We will not concede one atom of the freeness or riches of divine grace ; yet will we maintain that the Gospel is conducive to morality : for at the same time that it brings salvation to men, it inculcates every species of moral duty, and enforces the practice of godliness in the most authoritative and energetic manner. This is evident from the words before us ; in which we may notice,

I. The character of the Gospel—

The Gospel is supposed by many to be no other than a remedial law—

[The law given to man in Paradise, and republished on Mount Sinai, required perfect obedience. But fallen man can never obtain happiness on those terms. Hence many imagine, that Christ came to publish a new law, suited to our weak and fallen state. They suppose that his death atoned for our past transgressions ; and that it purchased for us a power to regain heaven by an imperfect but sincere obedience. Thus they make the Gospel to differ very little from the law. They reduce indeed the standard of the law ; but they insist upon obedience to its requirements, as the terms on which alone we

are to be saved. They ascribe to Christ the honour of obtaining salvation for us on these favourable conditions; but they make our performance of the conditions themselves to be the true and proper ground of our acceptance with God.]

But the Gospel, as described in the text, is widely different from this—

[Such a law as these persons substitute for the Gospel, could not properly be called “grace;” nor could it be said to “bring salvation;” for it does not *bestow* life as a gift, but requires it to be *earned*; and brings only an opportunity of earning it on easier terms. But that Gospel, which in the Apostle’s days “appeared to all men,” was “a dispensation of grace^a :” it revealed a Saviour; it directed our eyes to Christ, as having wrought out salvation for us; and it offered that salvation to us freely, “without money and without price.”

This is the true character of the Gospel. It is grace, mere grace, and altogether grace from first to last. It brings a free, a full, a finished salvation. It requires nothing to be done to purchase its blessings, or to merit them in any measure. In it God gives all, and we receive all.]

Yet there will be no room to charge the Gospel as licentious, if we consider,

II. The lessons it inculcates—

We have before said, that it requires nothing as *the price of life*. But *as an evidence of our having obtained life*, and in a variety of other views, it requires,

1. A renunciation of all sin—

[By “ungodliness” we understand every thing that is contrary to the first table of the law; as profaneness, unbelief, neglect of divine ordinances, &c. And, by “worldly lusts” we understand “all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life^b ;” or, in other words, the pleasures, riches, and honours of the world. All of these are to be “denied” and renounced. As, on the one hand, we are not to dishonour God; so neither, on the other hand, are we to idolize the creature. Nor is it against open transgressions merely that we are to guard, but against the secret “lusts” or desires. The very inclinations and propensities to sin must be mortified. This is indispensably necessary, to prove that we have embraced the Gospel aright: for, “they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts^c.”]

^a Eph. iii. 2.

^b 1 John ii. 15, 16.

^c Gal. v. 24.

2. A life of universal holiness—

[We have duties to God, our neighbour, and ourselves. Those which relate to ourselves are comprehended under the term “sobriety,” which includes the government of all our passions, and the regulation of all our tempers. “Righteousness” fitly expresses our duty to our neighbour, which briefly consists in this, The doing to him as we would that he, in a change of circumstances, should do unto us. “Godliness” pertains more immediately to the offices of piety and devotion, and marks that respect which we ought to have in our minds to God in all that we do. Thus extensive are the injunctions of the Gospel: it makes no abatement in its demands: it gives no licence to sin: it does not allow us to reduce its requisitions to our attainments; but urges us to raise our attainments to the standard which God has fixed. Nor is it on some particular occasions only that it requires these things: it enjoins us to “live” in this way as long as we are “in this present world,” having the tenour of our lives uniformly and perseveringly conformed to these precepts. Such is that holiness which the Gospel requires, and “without which no man shall see the Lord.”]

Sufficient has already been stated to shew the practical tendency of the Gospel. But its tendency will yet further appear from,

III. The motives it suggests—

The instructions which the Gospel affords, are not mere directions, but commands, enforced with the most powerful motives that can actuate the mind of man. Those suggested in the text may be considered as referring to,

1. Our own interest—

[There is a day coming, when our adorable Emmanuel, who once veiled his Deity in human flesh, will appear in all the glory of the Godhead. At that period, all that we have done for God shall be brought to light: and though our good works shall not be the meritorious ground of our acceptance with him, they shall be noticed by him with approbation, and rewarded with a proportionable weight of glory. This is “that blessed hope” which the Gospel has set before us, and to which it directs us continually to “look.”

And is not this sufficient to instigate us to holiness? If we kept this in view, how unremitted would be our diligence, and how delightful our work!]

2. Christ's honour—

[At the first appearance of the Lord Jesus, the scope and tendency of his doctrine were shadowed forth in miracles: the devils were cast out by him, and all manner of diseases were healed. But the full intent of his incarnation and death were not understood till after the day of Pentecost. Then the honour of his Gospel was completely vindicated. Then the most abandoned characters were changed: the lion became a lamb; and those who had borne the very image of the devil, were changed into the image of their God. At his next appearing, this will be more fully manifest. Then the lives of all his people will bear testimony respecting the end of his voluntary sacrifice. It will then be seen, beyond controversy, that "he gave himself to redeem us," not merely from condemnation, but from sin; from the love and practice of all iniquity; and to "purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Then "will he see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied:" then also will "the ignorance of foolish men be silenced:" and then will "Christ be glorified *in* his saints, and admired *in* all that believe^d;" for every grace they have exercised will "tend to his praise and honour and glory" in that solemn day^e.

And is not this also a strong motive to influence our minds? Can we reflect on the honour which will accrue to him, when the purifying efficacy of his Gospel shall be seen in all the myriads of his redeemed;—can we reflect on this, I say, and not long to add a jewel to his crown?]

INFER—

1. How little do they know of the Gospel who live in any kind of sin!

[It matters little whether men profess themselves followers of Christ, or not, if they indulge iniquity in their hearts. "Can one born of God habitually commit sin?" No^f: "we have not so learned Christ, if so be we have heard him, and been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus^g." The Gospel "teaches us to deny and renounce all sin" without exception. Whoever ye be, therefore, who live by any other rule than that which the Gospel proposes, know that ye will surely be confounded in the day of Christ's appearing. And the only difference between those who professed, and those who despised, the Gospel, will be, that "they who knew their Lord's will and did it not, will be beaten with the more and heavier stripes."]

2. How happy a world would this be, if all embraced and obeyed the Gospel!

^d 2 Thess. i. 10.

^f 1 John iii. 9.

^e 1 Pet. i. 7.

^g Eph. iv. 20, 21.

[All kinds of iniquity would be renounced, and all heavenly graces be kept in exercise. There would be no public wars, no private animosities, no wants which would not be relieved as soon as they were known. Evil tempers would be banished: the pains arising from discontent or malice would be forgotten. Peace and love and joy would universally abound. Surely we should then have a heaven upon earth. Let the Gospel be viewed in this light. Let us conceive the whole world changed like the converts on the day of Pentecost; and then we shall indeed confess its excellence, and pray that "the knowledge of the Lord may cover the earth as the waters cover the sea."]

MMCLXIV.

THE WORK OF THE TRINITY IN REDEMPTION.

Tit. iii. 4—7. After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

THE doctrine of the Trinity must be acknowledged to be deeply mysterious, and utterly surpassing our weak comprehensions. Yet is it so clearly laid down in the sacred writings, that we cannot entertain a doubt of its truth. Indeed, without admitting a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, the Scriptures are altogether inexplicable. What interpretation can we put on those words which are appointed to be used at the admission of persons into the Christian Church?—they are to be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Here are evidently three distinct Persons, all placed upon the same level, and all receiving the same divine honour: to suppose either of them a creature, is to suppose that a creature may have divine honours paid to him; when we are expressly told that God is a jealous God, and that he will not give his glory to another: and therefore, while we affirm that there is but one God, we cannot but acknowledge that there

is, in some way incomprehensible by us, a distinction of persons in the Godhead. This is further confirmed by the manner in which the inspired writers set forth the work of redemption: they frequently speak of it as effected by three distinct Persons, whom they represent as bearing three distinct offices, and as acting together for one end: thus St. Peter says, “We are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:” thus also St. Paul, in the passage before us, having represented all men, Apostles as well as others, in a most wretched state both by nature and practice, proceeds, in the words of my text, to set forth the work of redemption. He begins with tracing it up to *the Father, as the source* from whence it springs: he then mentions the *Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ, the one as the Author who procures it, the other as the Agent who applies it*; and then he concludes with declaring that *the glorification of sinful man is the grand end*, for the accomplishing of which the Sacred Three co-operate and concur: “After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs, according to the hope of eternal life.”

From these words we will take occasion to unfold the glorious work of redemption, from its first rise to its final consummation; and herein to set before you its original—procuring—efficient—and final cause.

I. Its original cause—

The original cause of our redemption is represented in my text to be “the kindness and love of God the Father.” God is love in his own nature; and every part of the creation bears the stamp of this perfec-

tion: the whole earth is full of his goodness. But man, the glory of this lower world, has participated the fruits of his kindness in far the most abundant measure; having been endued with nobler faculties, and fitted for incomparably higher enjoyments than any other creature. In some respects, God has loved man more than the angels themselves: for when they fell, he cast *them* down to hell, without one offer of mercy: but when man transgressed, God provided a Saviour for *him*. This provision, I say, was wholly owing to the love of God the Father: it was the Father who, from all eternity foreseeing our fall, from all eternity contrived the means of our recovery and restoration. It was the Father who appointed his Son to be our Substitute and Surety; and in due time sent him into the world to execute the office assigned him: and it is the Father who accepts the vicarious sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. He accepts at the hands of his own Son the payment that was due from us, and confers on us the reward which was due to Christ. Thus the Father's love contrived, appointed, and accepts the means of our salvation; and therefore in my text he himself is called "our Saviour;" "the love of God our Saviour." This title belongs more immediately to the Son, who died for us: but yet, as the Father is the original cause of our salvation, he is properly called "our Saviour." Nor is it the text only that represents the Father's love as the source of our redemption; the Scriptures uniformly speak the same language: "God so *loved* the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son:" "God *commendeth* his *love* toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us:" and again, "Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

This love, however, did not fully appear till after the ascension of our blessed Lord. The text says, "After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man *appeared*." The word in the original refers, I apprehend, to the shining forth of

the sun. Now the sun shines with equal brightness when it is behind a cloud, or when this part of the globe is left in midnight darkness; only it is not visible to us till it actually appears above the horizon, or till the clouds that veil it from our eyes are dissipated. So the love of God has shone from all eternity; "He has loved us," says the prophet, "with an everlasting love." But this love was behind a cloud till our Lord had finished his course upon earth; and then it appeared in all its splendour: so that now we can trace redemption to its proper source; and instead of imagining, as some have done, that the Father was filled with wrath, and needed to be pacified by the Son, we view even Christ himself as the Father's gift, and ascribe every blessing to its proper cause, the love of God.

It is true, however, that much was necessary to be done, before this love of God could shed forth its beams upon us. We proceed therefore to set before you,

II. The procuring cause of our redemption—

This in my text is set forth both negatively and positively: it was not any works of righteousness which we have done, but it was Jesus Christ: they who are saved will no doubt abound in works of righteousness; but these works are not the procuring cause of our redemption. What good works did Adam perform before God promised to send him a Saviour? What good works can any man do, before God endues him with his Holy Spirit? Or even after our conversion, what works of ours can challenge so glorious a reward? Yea, when do we perform any work whatever, which is not miserably defective, and which does not need the mercy of God to pardon it? Every one who knows the spirituality of God's law, and the defects that are in our best performances, will say with the Apostle Paul, "I desire to be found, not having my own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ." We may well acknowledge, therefore, as in the text, that

we are saved, not by works of righteousness which we have done. The only procuring cause of our salvation is Jesus Christ. Every thing which we receive comes to us on account of what he has done and suffered: if the Father's love appear to us, or if the Spirit be shed forth upon us, it is, as the text observes, "through Jesus Christ." It was his death which removed the obstacles to our salvation: the justice of God required satisfaction for our breaches of the divine law: the dishonour done to the law itself needed to be repaired: the truth of God, which was engaged to punish sin, needed to be preserved inviolate. Unless these things could be effected, there could be no room for the exercise of mercy, because it was not possible that one perfection of the Deity should be exercised in any other way than in perfect consistency with all the rest. But the death of Christ removed these obstacles. Christ offered himself as an atonement for sin; and at once honoured the law, satisfied justice, and paid the utmost farthing of our debt: thus, "mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other:" yea, by this means, "God is faithful and just, (not to condemn us, but) to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Nor is it in this view only that Jesus Christ procures our salvation: He has taken upon him the office of an advocate, which he is ever executing in heaven: "He ever lives," says the Apostle, "to make intercession for us." He pleads our cause with the Father: he urges his own merits on our behalf: like the high-priest of old, he presents blood, yea, his own blood, before the mercy-seat, and fills the most holy-place with the incense of his own intercession. Thus does he continually prevail for us; and we, for his sake, are loaded with all spiritual and eternal benefits.

That we obtain mercies thus, by virtue of his death and intercession, is evident also from other Scriptures; the Apostle says, that we have redemption through Christ's blood; and our Lord says, "I

will pray the Father, and he shall send you another Comforter :” so that, while we trace back our redemption to the Father’s love, we ascribe it also to the mediation of the Son.

The third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity also bears his part in this glorious work : we shall proceed therefore to set before you,

III. The efficient cause of our redemption—

As our salvation is not procured by our own merit, so neither is it effected by our own power : the text informs us, that we are “ saved by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”—The washing of regeneration may here refer to the rite of baptism, whereby we are introduced into the visible Church ; and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, to the internal change by which we are made real members of Christ’s body ; or, they may both mean the same thing, the latter being explanatory of the former ; and this I rather suppose to be the true meaning, because they are both put in opposition to the works of righteousness done by us : but, whichever it be, the Holy Ghost is here declared to be the only efficient cause of our salvation. It is He who regenerates us, and makes us partakers of the Divine nature : we are of ourselves dead, and therefore cannot restore ourselves to life : we have only an earthly and carnal nature, and therefore cannot perform the operations of an heavenly and spiritual nature : this is effected only by “ the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” We cannot of ourselves secure an interest in Christ, or discern the excellency of those things which he has purchased for us by his blood. We are told, that “ the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, nor can know them, because they are spiritually discerned :” It is the Spirit’s office to reveal them to us. Our Lord says, “ I will send you the Holy Ghost, and he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” So neither can we feel the kindness and love of God the Father, unless it be shed

abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us. Thus we shall remain ignorant of the Father's love, and uninterested in the mediation of the Son; yea, we shall continue dead in trespasses and sins, if the Holy Ghost do not work effectually in us. Notwithstanding all that the Father and the Son have done for us, we must eternally perish, if we be not renewed and sanctified by the influences of the Blessed Spirit. No resolutions or endeavours of our own will effect the work: nothing less than a divine power is sufficient for it: we must therefore experience the agency of the Holy Ghost on our own hearts, or remain for ever destitute of the salvation provided for us.

Under the law, whatever good appeared in the saints of God, was wrought in them by the Holy Spirit. But they received the Spirit in so small a measure, in comparison of what is vouchsafed to us under the Christian dispensation, that He can scarcely be said to have been given at all till after our Lord's ascension. The Evangelist says, that "the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified:" but from the time of that first effusion of the Holy Ghost, even to this present day, the Holy Ghost has been poured out abundantly, or richly, as the original word means, upon the Christian Church: so that not a few only may expect to feel his influences, but all; even all that will ask for them in Jesus' name.

IV. We come now, in the last place, to speak of the final cause of our redemption—

The final cause is the end; and, after having seen how the Sacred Three are engaged, we are naturally led to inquire, What is the end proposed? What is it which these Divine Persons intend to accomplish? The text furnishes us with a full and sufficient answer. It tells us, that the final cause for which such wonderful provision has been made, is, that man may be saved; or, in the express words of the text, "that, being justified by faith, we may be made heirs according to

the hope of eternal life.” The justification of sinful man was a concern so dear to God, that he gave his only-begotten Son in order to effect it; and so precious were our souls in the sight of Christ, that he willingly laid down his life for them. The Holy Spirit also cheerfully undertook his part in the economy of redemption. But it was a free justification, *i.e.* a justification by mere grace, that each Person of the Trinity had in view; they would cut off most effectually all boasting on the part of man, and reserve the whole glory to God alone. They have therefore freely offered it from first to last. The Father freely provided, the Son freely executed, and the Spirit freely applies, that salvation. Nor is it merely our justification, but our glorification also, which has been provided for. The Scriptures promise us eternal life, and encourage us to hope for it. They set it forth as an inheritance to which we are constituted heirs: and that, as heirs, we may in due time take possession of it, was the united design of the Three Persons in the Godhead. How astonishing that such an end should ever be proposed, and that such wonderful things should ever be done for the accomplishment of it! Well may we admire the kindness and love of God! well may we stand amazed at the condescension and compassion of the Son! and well may we burst forth into praises and thanksgivings for the grace and goodness of the Blessed Spirit! and indeed, “if we can hold our peace, surely the very stones will cry out against us.”

We shall now CONCLUDE with a few inferences from what has been said. And,

1. We may see how secure is the salvation of every believer—

The Three Persons in the Trinity are engaged to each other, as well as unto us. The Father gave his elect to Christ, on condition that he would make his soul an offering for them: and Christ laid down his life, on condition that the Spirit might be sent down into their hearts, to make them meet for his

glory. Now we are sure that Christ died for those who were given to him; and that the Holy Ghost will renew and sanctify those for whom Christ died. The only question that can arise is this; Has the Father loved me, and has Christ died for me? To this I answer, We cannot look into the book of God's decrees, and therefore we can only judge by what is already manifest. Are we regenerated and renewed by the Holy Ghost? if we are, we may be sure that whatever is needful shall be done for us. All that is required of us is, to wait upon God for fresh supplies of his Spirit; and to yield ourselves to the government of that Divine Agent. We then need not fear either men or devils: for none shall pluck us out of the Redeemer's hands; nor shall we have any temptation without a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it. If, however, we have not yet an evidence that we are regenerate, we must not hastily conclude that there is no salvation for us; for all the elect of God were once unregenerate, but in due time were begotten by the Spirit to a lively hope: so that we must still go to God for the gift of his Spirit, and for an interest in Christ: nor will he refuse the petition of any who call upon him in sincerity and truth. But if we have a good hope that we have believed in Christ, then let us rejoice in our security; for, Has the Father shewn such proofs of his eternal love in vain? Has the Son laid down his life for nought? Has the Spirit undertaken such a work, without ability to accomplish it? And is the salvation of our souls the grand end which each of these Divine Persons has had in view, and shall we at last be left to perish? Be of good courage, brethren! and rest persuaded, with the Apostle of old, that "none shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

2. We may see from hence, how great must be the condemnation of those who continue in unbelief—

If we reflect a moment upon the most astonishing provision which is made for us in the Gospel, and

the dignity of the Persons concerned for our welfare, we cannot but exclaim with the Apostle, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Surely, to despise the kindness and love of God our Father, will greatly aggravate our guilt: to trample on the blood of a dying Saviour, will add tenfold malignity to all our other sins: and to do despite to the Spirit of grace, will render our state hopeless, and inconceivably dreadful. Yet such is the state of all who reject the offers of the Gospel. As for the heathen, I had almost said, they are innocent in comparison of those who live and die unregenerate in a Christian land. O, my brethren, beware how you bring such aggravated condemnation upon your own souls! St. Paul expressly cautions you respecting this: he says, "He that despised Moses's law died without mercy: of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace?" Beware, therefore, lest ye lose this day of grace, and, like the foolish virgins, be shut out from the marriage-supper. Blessed be God, there are none excluded from the Gospel offer: we are commanded to preach it to every creature; and to assure you, that, if you will return to God, there is a way of access opened for you, and that you may at this instant come to him through the Son, and by the Spirit. If therefore you now desire mercy, beg the Holy Spirit to guide you unto Christ; and entreat the Lord Jesus Christ to introduce you to the Father. Nor need you doubt for one moment but that in this way you shall be partakers of everlasting salvation: though you are now dead, and doomed to everlasting death, you shall have spiritual and eternal life: though you are now hopeless, you shall be begotten to a lively hope: and though you are now strangers and foreigners, you shall be heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

Lastly; we see what obligations lie upon every professor of religion to abound in good works. The

Apostle, in the words immediately following the text, says, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, *that* (*N. B. to the end that*) they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works." Now these words are frequently understood as an exhortation to preach about good works; but it is not so: it is an exhortation to preach the very doctrines that I have now set before you; and to preach them *to the end that* believers may be careful to maintain good works. And indeed it is impossible to conceive stronger motives to a holy life than may be deduced from hence. Did the Father set his love upon us from all eternity, and choose us that we might be a holy people unto himself; and shall we do that which his soul hateth? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? Again: Did Christ undertake to become our surety; and did he actually die for us, in order to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify us unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works; and shall we take occasion from his death to rest secure in our wickedness? Shall we thus make the Holy One of God a minister of sin? Again: Did the Holy Spirit engage to renew and sanctify us, and shall we resist all his motions, till we have altogether quenched them? Shall we not rather comply with his solicitations, and cherish his sacred influences? And, once more: Have the blessed Trinity done so much, on purpose to make us heirs of eternal glory; and shall we to the utmost of our power thwart the Divine counsels, and reject the proffered mercies? O no! let us rather feel the obligations that are laid upon us: let us say with the Psalmist, What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits he hath done unto me? and let us endeavour to abound in good works, not that we may be saved by them, but that we may please Him who hath called us unto his kingdom and glory.

MMCLXV.

THE TRUE WAY OF PROMOTING GOOD WORKS.

Tit. iii. 8. *This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.*

ONE of the principal ends of a Christian ministry is, to stem the torrent of iniquity, and to meliorate the moral habits of mankind. If this be not attained, nothing is done to any good purpose. The mysteries which may be opened might as well be concealed: the arguments which may be urged might as well be suppressed. No glory can be brought to God, no benefit be secured to man, but through a moral change wrought upon the hearts and lives of men. In this, all are agreed. Even the profane, who neither regard nor practise one moral duty, will acknowledge this.

But then a question arises; ‘How shall this end be obtained?’ Upon this question there will be a great diversity of sentiment. The general answer would be, ‘Preach upon good works; inculcate the value and importance of them: trouble the people as little as possible about the doctrines and mysteries of religion; and labour principally, if not exclusively, to establish good morality.’ Unhappily for this land, this sentiment has in past times been too generally adopted. There may be some indeed (we trust they are very few), who run to a contrary extreme, and dwell upon doctrines to the utter exclusion of good works: but a very great part of the Christian world imagine, that the inculcating of Christian principles is of but little use in the production of morals: and hence it is that the peculiar doctrines of our religion have so small a share in our public ministrations. Many will even quote the words of our text as sanctioning this practice, and as enjoining ministers to dwell principally upon the subject of good works. But the text, properly understood, has a directly

opposite aspect : it is an express injunction to Titus to bring forward continually the leading doctrines of our religion, *in order to*^a lead men to the practice of its duties.

Following his instructions, we propose to shew,

I. What subjects a Christian minister ought chiefly to insist upon—

The things which St. Paul “willed us constantly to affirm,” are those which are specified in the foregoing context : they are,

1. The extreme degeneracy of our nature—

[What St. Paul speaks of himself and of all the other Apostles in their unregenerate state, is equally true of us^b : whether we look around us, or within us, we shall see that the representation is just. The foregoing part of it characterizes us at all times : the latter, whenever suitable opportunities are afforded us for displaying the feelings of our minds. The evil principles are within us, whether exercised or not : they may sleep, and thereby escape notice ; but they are easily roused, and ready to act the very moment that an occasion arises to call them forth.

Now men like to have these humiliating representations kept out of sight : they love to hear flattering accounts of their own praise-worthy conduct and amiable dispositions. But we must declare to them what God has declared to us ; and what we know by bitter experience to be true. If we neglect to shew them these things, how can we hope that they should ever be brought to repentance ? If they know not the depth of their own depravity, they can never be duly humbled for it, and consequently can never receive aright the consoling doctrines of the Gospel.

On these things then we must insist ; and respecting the truth of these things we must “constantly affirm.”]

2. The means which God has used for our recovery—

[In the fulness of his heart St. Paul expatiates upon the wonders of redeeming love^c. He traces all to the free, the rich, the boundless mercy of Jehovah ; who, in execution of his eternal counsels, has, for Christ’s sake, poured out his Spirit upon man, in order to renew his nature, and to fit him for glory. In short, he traces the salvation of man to three united causes ; the Father’s love, the Son’s merits, and the Spirit’s influence.

^a *’iva, to the end that.*

^b ver. 3.

^c ver. 4—7.

One would suppose that these subjects should be the most welcome of all that can be presented to our view. But this is not the case: for, however great the encouragement that is derived from them, they all have an humiliating tendency: they shew us the depth of our misery, that called for such a remedy: they constrain us to acknowledge our obligations to the grace and mercy of God, and our entire dependence on the merits of his Son, and the influences of his Spirit. On these accounts men would rather be amused with moral essays, than instructed in these mysterious truths.

But we must “affirm these things;” we must affirm them “constantly;” for they are “faithful sayings,” and truths in which our everlasting welfare depends. To make these known, and understood, and felt, should be the great object of all our labours.]

That we may not be thought to lay too great a stress on these subjects, we shall shew,

II. Why they deserve so great a portion of our attention—

The Apostle assigns reasons the most satisfactory imaginable:

1. They are the appointed means of promoting good works—

[It is a lamentable but undoubted fact, that where morals only are insisted on, or where the foregoing doctrines are but occasionally stated, the great mass of the people are ignorant of the fundamental truths of our religion, and their morals rarely experience any visible or important change. Nor can we wonder at this, if only we consider, that God has appointed other means for the reformation of mankind; and that the means he has appointed, are alone suited to produce the end.

Is it asked, ‘Whence the stating of Christian doctrines should work so powerfully, while the pressing home of moral duties fails to produce any such effects?’ we answer, That God will bless the means which are of his own appointment, when he will not prosper those which are substituted in their place; and, that there is in the doctrines before stated a natural and proper tendency to produce a change both of heart and life. Suppose a person truly to receive what God has declared respecting the extreme degeneracy of our nature; can he fail of being humbled in the dust? Can he do otherwise than stand amazed at the forbearance of God towards him? Can he refrain from saying, ‘O that I could serve my God with as much zeal and diligence as ever I exerted in violating his commands?’ Suppose him then to receive all the glorious truths relative to

the way of salvation; will he not be filled with admiring and adoring thoughts of God's mercy? Will not "the grace of Christ," and "the love of the Spirit," constrain him to cry out, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" Yes; let him only be penetrated with a sense of what God has done for his recovery, and he will not only "be careful to maintain," but studious to *excel*^d in, good works: he will not be contented to conform to the world's standard of morality, but will seek to become pure as God is pure, and "holy as God is holy."]

2. They "are good and profitable unto men"—

[This expression of the Apostle may be understood either of the doctrines of Christianity, or of the good works produced by them, or (which we rather prefer) of both together.

Who must not acknowledge the excellence and utility of *the doctrines*? We confidently ask, What has reformed the world, as far as any change has taken place in its habits? Have the dogmas of philosophers produced this effect; or has it been wrought by the influence of Christianity? Let any one contemplate the change that took place upon the converts on the day of Pentecost; let him see the odoriferous myrtle starting up in the place of the noxious brier, and say whether these doctrines be not "good and profitable unto men?" Or let the appeal be made to living Christians: are there not many that must say, 'Before I heard those doctrines I was altogether earthly, sensual, and devilish; but from the moment that I received them into my heart, I have experienced a total change of character: my spirit and temper have been wonderfully improved; my desires and pursuits have been altogether altered; I am become quite a new creature: now also my peace flows down like a river; death has been disarmed of its sting, and I look forward to the eternal state with unspeakable delight?'

That *the good works* which are produced by these doctrines are also beneficial, we gladly affirm. As for the works that are unconnected with these doctrines, they are neither good nor profitable unto men; because they are essentially defective both in their principle and end: but the works that flow from them are both "good and profitable:" they are truly "good," because they proceed from love to God, and from an unfeigned desire to promote his glory; and they are "profitable," because they are evidences to us of our own sincerity; they bring peace and joy into the soul^e; they advance our meetness for heaven; and they increase that eternal weight of glory which shall be given us in exact proportion to the number and quality of our works^f. Let not any one imagine, that, by dwelling on the

^d προίστασθαι.

^e Isai. xxxii. 17.

^f 2 Cor. v. 10.

principles of religion, we mean to disparage its *fruits*: no: only let the fruits proceed from love to God, and a desire to promote his glory, and they cannot be spoken of too highly: the smallest service performed in such a way, shall in no wise lose its reward.]

Hoping that the giving to the doctrines of Christianity a considerable share of our attention is vindicated to your satisfaction, we conclude with two words of ADVICE:

1. Meditate much and deeply on the fundamental principles of our religion—

[If it be the duty of ministers constantly to set before you the leading truths of Christianity, it must doubtless be your duty constantly, as it were, to revolve them in your minds. It is on them that you are to found your hopes: from them, you are to derive your motives and encouragements: through them, you will receive strength for the performance of all your duties. It is by them that you are to be brought to believe in God, and, "*having believed in God,*" to be made careful and diligent in all good works. Let them therefore be your meditation day and night, and you shall find them "sweeter than honey, or the honeycomb," and "dearer than thousands of gold and silver."

2. Display the influence of those principles in your life and conversation—

[If you dishonour your profession, the ungodly world will take occasion from your actions to vilify your principles, and to represent your misconduct as the natural effect of our preaching. If they would argue so in their own case, they would do well: for their disregard of all the higher duties of religion does indeed arise from their contempt of its doctrines. But the experience of the primitive saints, and of thousands that are yet alive, sufficiently refutes the idea of our principles tending to licentiousness. However, be careful that you do not give to your adversaries any occasion for such reflections. Shew them, that the doctrines you profess, are "doctrines according to godliness." The light of holiness will do more than ten thousand arguments to stop the mouths of gainsayers, and to recommend the Gospel to their acceptance. "Shew them therefore your faith by your works;" and constrain them to acknowledge, that you by your principles are enabled to attain a height of holiness, which they shall in vain attempt to emulate.]

PHILEMON.

MMCLXVI.

BENEVOLENCE ENCOURAGED.

Philem. 7. *We have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.*

IN no epistle that was ever written was contained, I apprehend, a greater measure of address and skill than in this. The Apostle had a deep knowledge of the human heart, and an exquisite sensibility within his own bosom; so that, whilst speaking with the utmost simplicity of mind, he touched the feelings of his friend with a delicacy that no rules of art could ever have supplied. It is thought by many, that to express approbation of a person when soliciting a favour, is to flatter, to cajole, to bribe him; and that to praise him to his face, under any circumstances, is unworthy adulation. That the offering of praise in an extravagant way is inexpedient and disgusting, I readily acknowledge: but to applaud what is good in a man, in order to encourage him in the prosecution of his way, is nothing more than what equity demands, and what a knowledge of the human heart will fully approve. Accordingly, we find that the Apostle Paul was ever ready, in all his epistles, to commend the virtues of his converts, as far as the occasion called for such acknowledgments, and truth would sanction them. To the Christians at Rome he says, "I am persuaded of you, my brethren, that

ye are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another^a." To those at Corinth he writes, "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ^b." In like manner, to the Thessalonians he says, "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ^c." It is in the same strain that he addresses "his beloved fellow-labourer," Philemon, in the words before us; which will naturally lead me to shew you,

I. The proper office of love—

Love ought to be exercised towards every child of man; yea, even to our enemies: but it is due in a more especial manner to "the saints;" as St. Paul has said: "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men; especially unto them that are of the household of faith^d." Nor is this preference to be shewn upon any party-principle: it is founded upon strong, substantial grounds: it is actually due to them;

1. Because they are more dear to God than others—

[From all eternity were they "chosen of God," and "predestinated to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace^e." In due season he calls them by his grace^f, and, "by the incorruptible seed of his word^g," "begets them again unto a lively hope^h:" so that they are sons, and consequently "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christⁱ." Shall not this, then, give them a priority in our esteem? When brought into such a state as this, shall they

^a Rom. xv. 14.

^b 1 Cor. i. 4—7.

^c 1 Thess. i. 2, 3.

^d Gal. vi. 10.

^e Eph. i. 4—6.

^f Rom. viii. 30.

^g 1 Pet. i. 23.

^h 1 Pet. i. 3.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 16, 17.

be regarded by us at no higher rate than the enemies of God, and the children of the wicked one? Assuredly not: "if we love Him that begat, we *ought*, in a pre-eminent degree, to love those who are begotten of him^k."]

2. Because the Lord Jesus Christ is more deeply interested in them—

[They have sought through him the remission of their sins: to him alone they look, as their only hope. On his word they rely: in the fountain of his blood they have washed: in his righteousness they are clothed: they habitually live by faith upon him, and receive their all out of his fulness. They are, in fact, the members of his body^l: yea, surprising as it must appear, "they are one spirit with him^m." And does the Lord Jesus Christ so identify himself with them? does he even say, that "what we do to the least of his brethren, we do it unto *him*?" and shall we place them on a level with others who have no relation to him? It were quite absurd to imagine, that others, who stand in no such relation to him, should be placed on a level with them: it cannot, it must not be.]

3. Because they are more nearly related to ourselves—

[In a *natural* sense, we are all children of one common parent; but in a spiritual sense, there is a very wide difference between us and others: others are still "strangers and foreigners; but we (supposing, I mean, that we have been truly converted to Christ) are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of Godⁿ." Yea, being all "one body in Christ, we all are members one of another^o." Let any one then judge: has the eye or ear no claim upon the hand or foot? Does not Nature herself teach us, that "the members of the same body should all have the same care one for another^p?" and that, whatever attention we shew to others, our highest regards are due to these?]

4. Because they are themselves of superior worth—

[God himself has said, and therefore *we* may say it without vanity, "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour^q." He is "a partaker of the Divine nature^r." The Holy Ghost himself dwelleth in him: yea, "the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ come to him, and make their abode with him^s." They are altogether the Lord's—his property,

^k 1 John v. 1.

^l Eph. v. 30.

^m 1 Cor. vi. 17.

ⁿ Eph. ii. 19.

^o 1 Cor. xii. 12, 20, 27.

^p 1 Cor. xii. 25.

^q Prov. xii. 26.

^r 2 Pet. i. 4.

^s John xiv. 23.

his people. Their faculties and powers, whether of mind or body, are devoted to his service. They live but to advance his glory in the world: and with a view to their welfare does God himself govern and direct the world^t. So highly are they esteemed in heaven, that the very angels account it an honour to be their servants^u? Is there not then a pre-eminent regard due to them from *us*? There is: and we should shew it in all our conduct towards them. We should be particularly careful to supply *their* wants; to supply them, too, in such a way, as not only to *relieve their bodies*, but to "*refresh their souls*." Our tender feelings towards them, our affectionate expressions, our sympathizing tears, should shew them that we feel an identity of interest with them; and that we are God's messengers, sent expressly for the relief and comfort of their souls.]

I well know that this kind of love will, to many, appear partial and confined: but it is such as God approves: and in proof that it is so, I will point out,

II. Its excellence, when so employed—

To prevent misapprehension, let me again say, that the exercise of love is *not to be confined* to the saints, but only to be maintained towards them in a superior degree. A love of benevolence and beneficence is due to all: a love of complacency is due to the saints alone: and towards them it should be exercised to such an extent, that we should be willing even to "lay down our lives for them^x." How estimable this divine principle was in the judgment of St. Paul, may be seen from the manner in which he speaks of it: "I have great joy and consolation in thy love; because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother." He evidently had a high idea of its excellency. And on what grounds? Because he felt,

1. How pre-eminently God was honoured by it—

[It was so exercised in obedience to an express command of God: so that God's care for the saints was displayed in it. Besides, it bore upon it the very stamp and character of God, who "manifests himself to his saints as he does not unto the world^y." Hence it necessarily led the saints to behold God's

^t Matt. xxiv. 22.

^x 1 John iii. 16.

^u Heb. i. 14.

^y John xiv. 21, 22.

hand, and to taste his love, in every mercy they received; and, consequently, it stirred them up to glorify him, as the true source of all their blessings. This is spoken of by the Apostle as a very distinguished excellence of this love, that “it not only supplies the want of the saints (which is, in comparison, a very trifling consideration), but that it causeth thanksgiving to God; whilst by the experience of it many are made to glorify God for the grace so exercised, and “for the subjection which persons under its influence manifest to the Gospel of Christ^z.”]

2. How greatly the Gospel also was recommended and adorned—

[This love is the fruit of the Gospel, and of the Gospel alone. Not an atom of it is found in the whole world, except as it is produced by the Gospel of Christ. There may be generosity and humanity exercised on natural and carnal principles: but love to the saints *as saints*, for *Christ's sake*, and a *special endeavour to relieve Christ himself in them*, are feelings to which an unconverted man is an utter stranger. In truth, it is from the Gospel that all the great works of benevolence chiefly flow. Look at Bible-societies, Mission-societies, Benevolent-societies, and all which have *religion* for their end, and you will find them all *set on foot* by persons professing the Gospel of Christ. I say not but that other persons may be brought in to *contribute* to their support: but I do say, that they almost universally *originate* with the followers of Christ: and it is a fact, that in one single church where the Gospel is preached in simplicity, more societies of this kind are established and upheld, than in a dozen, I had almost said an hundred, other parishes of equal population, and equal wealth?” In fact, what is the Gospel, but “faith working by love?” When, therefore, its real tendency is thus strongly marked, it cannot but rejoice every soul, that either tastes the sweetness of the Gospel, or desires its advancement in the world.]

3. What extensive benefits accrued to it from the Church—

[Though, as we have said, the benefit of individual saints is a small matter in comparison of the honour that accrues to God; yet, if viewed in its full extent, it is of no light moment. We have spoken of love as being exercised in a way to refresh the souls of the saints. And let me ask, whether, if at any time we have visited a person in deep affliction, and mingled our tears with his, and laboured with tender and self-denying

^z 2 Cor. ix. 12, 13.

services for his good, we have not seen, as it were, a load taken off his mind, and his sorrow turned into joy? Have not persons so comforted looked up to God with grateful adoration for the blessings bestowed? Have not their friends and attendants, too, been often filled with admiration of the persons manifesting these dispositions; and been constrained to cry out, "Behold, how these Christians love one another!" There is no knowing where the benefit arising from these efforts stops, or to how many one single exercise of love may reach. In this view, then, this blessed principle commends itself to us, and should fill with joy and comfort every one who beholds it in active operation.]

4. What an evidence it gave of substantial piety in him who possessed it—

[Almsgiving affords no criterion for piety; nor do the *common* offices of love. But love to the *saints* for *Christ's sake*, is both to the person himself, and to all who behold him, a decided evidence that he is born of God. To himself, I say, it is an evidence: for it is said, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren^a." And again, "Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth: and *hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him*^b." Nor is it a less clear evidence to others: for our Lord has said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another^c." Say then, was there not occasion for joy in the Apostle's mind, when the piety of his friend stood so confessed, that it was impossible for any one to entertain a doubt of it? Yes: and wherever *we* behold similar fruits of faith, we do, and *will*, rejoice.]

Let me now IMPROVE the subject,

1. In a way of thankful acknowledgment—

[I bless God that the commendation given to Philemon is justly applicable to many of you: *to you* especially, *who are engaged in visiting* the sick, instructing the ignorant, comforting the afflicted, and relieving the necessitous. I can bear witness that your efforts have been crowned with success, not only in refreshing the bowels of the saints, but in awakening also and saving the souls of sinners^d. Yes, 'brother; yes, sister; I have much joy and consolation in the grace exercised by thee, and in the good effected by thee. May God recompense it into thy bosom an hundred-fold! *To you, also,*

^a 1 John iii. 14. ^b 1 John iii. 18, 19. ^c John xiii. 35.

^d This is adapted to a *Visiting or Benevolent Society*. Of course, this part of the subject must be made to suit the particular occasion.

who have contributed to aid the society with your funds, an acknowledgment is justly due: and I trust that your liberality on the present occasion will afford me fresh ground for joy and gratitude. Yet, I must not let my gratitude terminate altogether on you; but must rather view God himself in you; and give glory to Him, “from whom alone cometh every good and perfect gift.”]

2. In a way of affectionate exhortation—

[Let none of you rest in any attainment. The Apostle commended his Thessalonian converts, because “their faith and love grew exceedingly^e.” Let me have similar ground of joy in you. You have received of us how you ought to walk and to please God, and have “made your profiting to appear:” but “we beseech you, brethren, to abound more and more^f.” Endeavour to honour God more; to adorn the Gospel more; to diffuse richer benefits among the saints; and to give more abundant evidence of your piety to all around you. So shall you be approved of your God, both now and in the eternal world: for “he is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed towards his name, in that ye *have* ministered unto the saints, and *do* minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end^g.”]

^e 2 Thess. i. 3, 4.

^f 1 Thess. iv. 1.

^g Heb. vi. 10, 11.

MMCCLXVII.

THE EFFICACY OF THE GOSPEL.

Philem. 10, 11. *I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me.*

THE inspired volume certainly differs in many respects from what we might have expected. We should have supposed, that it would contain only such things as could not be known except by revelation. But, behold, here is a letter, written to a single individual, on a subject which might occur at any time or place; a letter, containing no particular point of doctrine, but simply requesting a master to receive with kindness an offending, but repentant, slave. It should seem strange, I say, that such an epistle should be dictated by inspiration, and be

preserved for the edification of the Church to the end of time. But so it is : and an attentive consideration of its contents will soon convince us, that it is worthy of its Divine Author. We must never forget, that the Word of God is intended to regulate our spirit and conduct in every situation and relation of life : and, in this view, the epistle before us possesses a transcendent excellency : for, though it does not state particularly any of *the doctrines* of the Gospel, it does shew us in a very impressive manner,

I. *The spirit which it breathes*, where its influence is complete—

“I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds.” Let us here mark,

1. The interest which the Apostle took in the welfare of Onesimus—

[Onesimus was a slave belonging to Philemon, who was a person of eminence, perhaps a minister in the Church at Colosse^a. He had fled from his master, having, it should seem, first robbed him ; and had come, many hundred miles off, to Rome ; where he conceived he should be perfectly out of the reach of his master's inquiries. It happened that at that time Paul was a prisoner at Rome ; yet, though a prisoner, was permitted to see, and to instruct, all who came to him. Onesimus, probably from curiosity, went to see and hear this famous servant of Christ ; and, through the special grace of God, was converted under his ministry. He soon made himself known to Paul ; and, approving himself a sincere convert to the faith of Christ, ingratiated himself into the favour of the Apostle, who received and loved him as a son. In truth, he was now, in a spiritual sense, his son ; since, by the ministry of the Word, the Apostle, as it is expressed, had “ begotten him in his bonds.” The Apostle now desired to restore him to the favour and protection of that master whom he had so greatly injured : and for that end he wrote this epistle to Philemon, and sent it by the hands of Onesimus himself : for he judged, that no man can be a true penitent without making restitution to all whom he has wronged, and asking pardon of all whom in any great degree he has offended. He judged this to be necessary, as well for the peace and comfort of Onesimus, as for the honour of God and his Gospel : and therefore, notwithstanding the loss of his kind attentions would be severely felt

^a ver. 1, 2.

by the Apostle, he would on no account retain him at Rome, but sent him back to his master, Philemon, at Colosse.]

2. The exquisite delicacy with which he pleaded his cause—

[In point of delicacy of feeling and sentiment, this epistle has not perhaps its equal in the world. Some of its leading features we will proceed to notice.

The Apostle's object was, so to break the matter to Philemon, as not to shock his feelings; and so plead the cause of Onesimus, as to procure for him a favourable reception. Hence arose a necessity for touching every point with tenderness and delicacy; which the Apostle proceeded to do, not by rules of art, (though the most consummate wisdom could not have devised any plan more appropriate than that which is here pursued,) but by the simple dictates of love.

He begins with acknowledging Philemon's eminence both in faith and love; and with declaring, what exquisite joy he felt, both in the accounts which he had heard of him, and in remembering him before God in his daily supplications^b. This had a tendency to disarm Philemon, if he felt any bitter resentment against Onesimus: for he could not well indulge hatred, when he himself experienced so much love.

The Apostle then proceeds, in the language of meek entreaty, to request Philemon's pardon in behalf of this returning slave. He reminds Philemon, that, as he himself, no less than Onesimus, had received the truth by means of his ministry, he might well assume the authority of a father, and *require*, rather than *request*, the performance of so plain a duty: but he chose rather to entreat as a favour, as a favour to him who was now "grown old" in the service of his Lord, and was "a prisoner too for the truth's sake," that he would be reconciled to Onesimus, whom the Apostle himself regarded as a son^c. How could such a request as this, a request from such a person, under such circumstances, be refused? Methinks, it was not possible for Philemon, however indignant against Onesimus, to reject a petition offered by his own spiritual father, in such terms as these.

He goes on to remind Philemon, that Onesimus, who had hitherto but ill deserved that name^d, since he had been so unprofitable, would henceforth act a more worthy part, and be indeed profitable, in whatever capacity he should be employed. This consideration would not be without its influence; more especially as the Apostle speaks of himself as having been

^b ver. 4—7.

^c ver. 8—10.

^d Onesimus means *profitable*: and it is in reference to the import of his name that the Apostle speaks.

materially benefited by the services of Onesimus, as Philemon himself would in all probability be in future^e.

He then suggests a thought, which must of necessity produce a great effect upon Philemon's mind. Philemon, being himself an eminent servant of Christ, could not but know that God has formed his purposes from all eternity; and that, if any be converted to the faith of Christ, it is in consequence of God's electing love, who has ordained the time, the means, the manner, and every thing respecting his conversion, from all eternity. Now, says Paul, who can tell? Perhaps all that Onesimus did, and whereby he so justly provoked thy displeasure, was, in the counsel of God, ordained to be the means whereby he should be converted to the faith of Christ; and, though not in his own intention, yet in the intention of an unerring God, "he therefore departed for a season, that thou mightest receive him for ever, not now a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved^f?" This would in no respect excuse the wickedness of Onesimus, any more than God's intention to redeem the world would excuse the murderers of the Lord Jesus. Onesimus was a free agent in all that he did: but perhaps God had seen fit to leave him to the wickedness of his own heart, in order that he might thus be brought under the ministry of Paul, and have the grace of God the more abundantly magnified in his conversion, and in the whole of his future life. How effectually would such a thought as this engage a pious mind, like that of Philemon's, to co-operate with God, and to advance to the uttermost the purposes of his grace!

Lest the recollection of the losses sustained by means of Onesimus should rankle in Philemon's mind, the Apostle further adds, that whatever Onesimus might owe him, he (Paul) would most gladly undertake to pay; though he did not much expect that such a demand of pecuniary compensation would be made upon him, by one who owed to him what was of more value than the whole world, even his own soul^g.

Finally, as though he were pleading for his own life, and all his happiness were bound up in the obtaining of this request, he entreats: "If thou count me a partner, (a partaker of the same salvation with thyself,) receive him as myself^h." "Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord;" for they are all in commotion whilst his acceptance with thee is in suspense; and nothing but thy compliance with my request can *give them rest*ⁱ.

Now the point which I wish to be noticed here, is, not *the line of argument* merely, but *the delicacy of the sentiment*, and

^e ver. 11—14. ^f ver. 15, 16. ^g ver. 18, 19. ^h ver. 17.

ⁱ ver. 20. This is the force of the word ἀνάπαυσον.

the exquisite address with which the Apostle seeks to attain his end. This, if it had been the effect of art, would have gained our admiration: but, as the effect of Christian principle, and Christian love, it is edifying in the highest degree, inasmuch as it shews what a spirit the Gospel breathes, and what genuine Christianity will universally inspire^k.]

From the account which the Apostle gives of Onesimus, we are led to notice,

II. *The change which it operates* where its influence is begun—

“Onesimus,” says the Apostle, “was in time past unprofitable, but now will be profitable both to thee and me.” The state of every man previous to his conversion may be said to be unprofitable, because he does not answer the true ends of his creation: he does nothing for God, nothing for the Church, nothing for his own soul. But no sooner will divine grace reach his heart, than he will endeavour to be serviceable,

1. To the Church of God generally—

[Onesimus, having received the truth in the love of it, instantly set himself to work, if by any means he might render service to the Apostle in his confinement. Doubtless such a servant, at such a juncture, was an unspeakable comfort to the Apostle, and would greatly alleviate the pains and sorrows of his imprisonment. And, no doubt, whatever Onesimus was able to do, he did with great delight, not shrinking back from the horrors of a prison, nor intimidated by the sufferings inflicted on St. Paul, but rejoiced to have an opportunity of testifying his love to one, who had been such an instrument of good to his own soul.

Now here we see, what every true convert will do. He will begin to inquire, ‘How can I co-operate with my minister in his labours of love? How can I strengthen his hands? How can I encourage his heart? What can I do, either to shew my love to him, or to impart to others the benefits which I myself have received? Can I assist in any way in visiting the sick, in instructing the ignorant, in relieving the needy, in teaching the rising generation? Whether my talents be more or less, I am determined that they shall not be wrapped in a napkin, but be diligently improved for my God. Freely I have received;

^k Observations might have been made also on ver. 21, 22. But enough is here said to illustrate the point in hand.

and I will freely give.' Yes, beloved brethren, how unprofitable soever a man may have been in times past, he will not willingly be so any longer, but will be profitable to his minister, and to the Church of Christ, as far as his ability will admit.]

2. To those who have a more immediate claim upon him—

[Onesimus would henceforth be "profitable to his master Philemon." O! in what a different spirit would he serve his master now! We apprehend indeed that Philemon instantly gave him his liberty; and that he immediately became an assistant in the Church of Colosse, to whom St. Paul gave him a most satisfactory testimonial¹: but, if he had continued in the service of Philemon, we can have no doubt but that he would have justified the character given of him by St. Paul, and proved truly profitable to his master. And herein divine grace will be sure to shew itself: it will lead us to fill up our station in life, whatever that station be, with the utmost care and diligence. Are we servants? we shall regard our master as placed over us by the Lord himself, and shall do him service as unto the Lord. Were we even slaves, we should fulfil our duties as unto God himself, who has appointed us our lot, and who requires that we execute with fidelity the work he has assigned us. It is often made a matter of complaint indeed against religious servants, that they are idle, and impatient of reproof. And glad should I be, if there were not too much reason for this complaint. But let not this evil be imputed to religion: for religion condemns it utterly: the Gospel gives no sanction to such conduct, nor any occasion for it. It requires that servants demean themselves with modesty and humility; and not towards kind masters only, but towards such as are harsh and severe^m: and it especially enjoins, that they fulfil all their duties, "not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as unto God, doing the will of God from their heartsⁿ." Let it be remembered then, that the true and proper tendency of the Gospel is, to improve us in every station and relation of life: and that, if it operate not this change in our hearts and lives, we have never received it as we ought^o.]

LEARN then from hence,

1. To abound in all acts and offices of love—

[Who does not admire the character given of Philemon, whose love was such as to attract the notice of all, and constrain them to acknowledge the abundance of the grace bestowed upon him, whilst, by his kindness and liberality, "the

¹ Col. iv. 9.

ⁿ Eph. vi. 5—8.

^m 1 Pet. ii. 18.

^o Tit. ii. 11, 12.

bowels of the saints were so greatly refreshed?^p” And who does not admire the interest which the Apostle took in the welfare of a poor slave who had run away from his master? Such, beloved, are the offices in which we should delight. None on earth are so low or abandoned, but they deserve notice from us, and should be objects of our pity and compassion. I call upon you then, if there be any, whom by your instructions you may restore to God, or by your kind offices you may reconcile to man, to engage in the good work with all your heart, and to labour to the uttermost to diffuse the blessings which are the sure result of faith and love.]

2. To bring men, if possible, under the sound of the Gospel—

[See the effects produced on this worthless character. Worse than unprofitable had Onesimus been: but, by the hearing of the Gospel, he was turned to God. Of whom then will you despair? Who will not lay down the weapons of his rebellion, when God speaks with power to his soul? It may be that a person is hardened under the Gospel, even as Onesimus was: for we cannot doubt but that the pious Philemon had endeavoured to watch over his domestics: but in vain had all *his* instructions been. Not so the instructions of the Apostle Paul, when accompanied with a divine power to his soul: *then* he became a new creature; and, though a slave of man, was made a freeman of the Lord: so may it be with those whom *you* may bring to attend where Christ is preached. God may meet them, as he did Onesimus. Many who, like Zacheus, have thought of nothing but gratifying a foolish curiosity, have been made to obey the voice of Christ, and have found salvation come unto their souls. If one such instance occur through your instrumentality, you will have “saved a soul from death, and hid a multitude of sins^q.”]

3. To bear in mind your own obligations to your great Advocate and Intercessor, Jesus Christ—

[Doubtless Onesimus would long remember his obligations to St. Paul. But what were they in comparison with what you owe to the Lord Jesus Christ? Think how you have cast off the yoke of Almighty God, and robbed him of all the service to which he was entitled, and gone to a distance from him, that you might live as “without God in the world.” Think how the Lord Jesus Christ has instructed you, and brought you to the knowledge of salvation, and restored you to the favour of your offended God. Think how he has not merely offered to pay your debt, but has actually discharged it. Yes;

^p ver. 6, 7.

^q Jam. v. 19, 20.

“of him it was exacted,” says the prophet, “and he was made answerable^r,” and he “laid down his own life a ransom for you.” To his continual intercession too are you indebted for all that peace which is maintained between God and your souls. Will you not then be thankful to him? or rather, shall there be any bounds to your gratitude? Bless him then, and adore and magnify him, and call upon all that is within you to bless his holy name. And now endeavour to be “profitable to him.” Consecrate to him all your faculties, and all your powers. Live for him: die for him, if need be: and begin now the song, in which you shall, ere long, join all the choirs of heaven: “To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and our Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen^s.”]

^r Isai. liii. 7. The marginal translation.

^s Rev. i. 5, 6.

HEBREWS.

MMCCLXVIII.

CHRIST'S ASCENSION TO GLORY.

Heb. i. 3. *Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

A REVELATION of God, by whatever means or instrument it may be communicated, demands our solemn attention. But Christianity requires the highest possible degree of reverence, because the Messenger, by whom it was promulgated, as far surpassed all other instruments in excellence, as the truths delivered by him are of deeper and more mysterious import. It is in this view that the Apostle introduces this sublime description of Christ; in which we may notice,

I. The dignity of his person—

We cannot conceive any expressions more grand than these which are here applied to Christ, and which set forth,

1. His essential dignity—

[The Father is the fountain, and the archetype of all perfection. Of him Jesus is a perfect copy. As the impression on the wax corresponds with all the marks and lineaments of the seal, so is Jesus "the express image" of the Father in every particular, insomuch that "he who hath seen him hath

seen the Father^a." But the Father is, in himself, invisible to mortal eyes^b; it is in Christ only that he is seen: on which account Christ is called "the image of the invisible God^c." And as all the glory of the sun is seen in the bright effulgence of its rays, so is all the glory of the Godhead seen in the face of Jesus Christ^d.]

2. His official dignity—

[It was Jesus who made the worlds^e: and he it is who upholds them by the same "powerful word" that first spake them into existence^f. By him all things maintain their proper courses, and the order first assigned them. Nor is there any thing that happens either in the kingdom of providence or of grace, which does not proceed from his will, or tend to his glory. There is nothing so small but it occupies his attention, nothing so great but it is under his controul^g. Every thing that is good owes its existence to his immediate agency, and every thing that is evil, to his righteous permission.]

Intimately connected with this is,

II. The diversity of his ministrations—

As in the Church there are "diversities of administrations and of operations^h" under Christ, who is the author of them, so in the work of Christ himself there is a diversity of ministrations.

1. He "purged our sins" by his blood on earth—

[Sin needed an atonement, and such an atonement as no created being could offer. Jesus therefore, the Creator himself, undertook to make an atonement for us, and such an one as should satisfy divine justice on our behalf, and put honour on that law which we had violated. For this end he assumed that nature which had sinned, and endured the curse due to our iniquities. When he had only to create or to uphold the universe, his *word* was sufficient: but when he came to redeem the world, nothing would suffice but his own precious *blood*. Other priests offered the blood of bulls and of goats as typical expiations: but, to make a true and proper atonement, Jesus was forced to offer up "*himself*." His prayers and tears were insufficient: if he would purge away our sins, he must do it "by himself," by "pouring out his soul unto death."

This is what Jesus undertook to do; nor did he ever draw back till he could say, "It is finished."]

^a John xiv. 9.

^c Col. i. 15.

^e ver. 2. and John i. 3.

^g Matt. x. 29, 30.

^b 1 Tim. i. 17. and vi. 16.

^d Col. ii. 9. 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^f Col. i. 17.

^h 1 Cor. xii. 4—6.

He ascended to complete his work in heaven—

[The high-priest, after offering the sacrifice, entered within the veil, to present it there. Thus Jesus “passed into the heavens,” the place where he was to finish his ministrations. In the presence of all his disciples he ascended thither, giving thereby a decisive evidence that nothing further remained for him to do on earth. But a further evidence of this arises from the posture in which he ministers in heaven. The priests under the law *stood*, because they needed to repeat the same sacrifices continually: but Jesus having offered one sacrifice once for all, “*sat down* at the right hand” of God, the place of supreme dignity and power. From this we infer the perfection of his sacrifice on earthⁱ; and are assured, that whatever remains to be done by him within the veil, is transacted in an authoritative manner, all power being given to him to “save to the uttermost” them that trust in him.]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. The security of those who believe in Christ—

[Who is it that interests himself for them? “Jehovah’s Fellow^k.” Who bought them with his blood? The God of heaven and earth^l. Who has undertaken to keep them? He that “upholdeth all things by his word^m.” Who is continually engaged in completing their salvation? He that is constituted Head over all things for this very purposeⁿ. What then have they to fear either from their past guilt, or their present weakness? Let them only be strong in faith, and “none shall ever pluck them out of his hand^o.”]

2. The danger of those who are yet in unbelief—

[In proportion to the dignity of this adorable Saviour must be the guilt of rejecting him. This is frequently insisted on in this epistle^p. Let us lay it to heart. To neglect this Jesus is such a mixture of folly and ingratitude, of impiety and rebellion, as involves in it the highest degree of criminality, and subjects us to the heaviest condemnation^q. Let those who are guilty of this neglect remember that “the enemies of Jesus shall all become his footstool:” and let them kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and they perish without a remedy^r.]

ⁱ Heb. x. 11, 12.

^k Zech. xiii. 7.

^l Acts xx. 28.

^m Col. i. 17, 18

ⁿ Eph. i. 22, 23.

^o John x. 28.

^p Heb. ii. 3, 4. and x. 28, 29.

^q Deut. xviii. 18, 19.

^r Ps. ii. 6, 9, 10, 12.

MMCLXIX.

CHRIST'S INCARNATION.

Heb. i. 6. *When he bringeth in the First-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.*

IF God had been pleased to try our faith, he might have required us to believe whatsoever he should reveal, even though he should mention it but once: but, in condescension to our weakness, he has given us a great variety of testimonies to confirm every fundamental doctrine of our holy religion. The doctrine of the divinity of Christ is as important as any in the whole Bible: and it stands, not on one or two doubtful passages of Scripture, but on the plainest, and almost numberless declarations of the inspired writers. In the passage before us the Apostle is shewing the infinite superiority of Jesus above the highest orders of created beings; and he adduces a whole series, as it were, of testimonies in proof of this point. The one which we have now read is taken from the 97th Psalm, and confessedly relates to Jesus^a.

In discoursing upon it we are led to observe,

I. That Christ is a proper object of divine worship—

The command contained in the text is itself decisive upon the point—

[God is a jealous God, and claims divine worship as his unalienable prerogative^b; yet he at the same time requires it to be given to his Son. Would he do this, if his Son were not worthy of that high honour? Would he, contrary to his express declaration, give his glory to another^c? We are assured he would not; and therefore his Son must be a proper object of our supreme regard.]

The practice of the Christian Church confirms it beyond a doubt—

^a It speaks of Christ's kingdom, ver. 1; and the duty of angels, here called gods, to worship him, ver. 7.

^b Matt. iv. 10.

^c Isai. xlii. 8.

[Stephen, when he was full of the Holy Ghost, and his face shone like that of an angel, at the very instant that he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, addressed himself, not to the Father, but to Jesus; and *that* too in terms precisely similar to those in which Jesus in his dying hour had addressed the Father^d. Can we wish for any plainer example? The Apostle Paul, under the buffetings of Satan, applied to Jesus for relief, and was expressly answered, as he himself tells us, by Jesus; in consequence of which answer he from that time “gloried in his infirmities, that the *power of CHRIST* might rest upon him^e.” The whole Church of God, not only at Corinth, but “in all other places,” are described and characterized by this very thing, the worshipping of Christ^f. But the Church triumphant no less than the Church militant are incessantly presenting before him their humble and grateful adorations^g.

Surely if worship be not to be paid to Christ, the Scriptures are not calculated to instruct, but to deceive and ensnare us.]

Nor must it be forgotten, that to worship Christ is the highest act of obedience to the Father—

[It is the Father who enjoins it in the text; and *that*, not to men only, but to angels also: “He has committed all judgment to his Son *for this very purpose*, that all men may honour the Son even as they honour the Father^h,” he even swears that all, at the peril of their souls, shall bow to Jesusⁱ; and, so far from thinking himself dishonoured by it, he expressly requires it, in order that he himself may be more abundantly glorified^k.]

The text leads us further to observe respecting Christ,

II. That his incarnation affords a special call to all both in heaven and earth to worship him—

“The bringing in of the First-begotten into the world,” may comprehend the whole period of his reign under the Gospel dispensation; in which case the command to worship him is *general*: but if we confine the expression to the time of his incarnation, the command to worship him will be a *special* call, arising from the circumstance of his incarnation, and founded on it. To elucidate it in this latter view we may observe that,

^d Compare Acts vii. 59, 60. with Luke xxiii. 34, 46.

^e 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

^f 1 Cor. i. 2.

^g Rev. vii. 9, 10.

^h John v. 22, 23.

ⁱ Rom. xiv. 10, 11.

^k Phil. ii. 10, 11.

1. It (his incarnation) affords the brightest discovery of the Divine perfections—

[The angels had doubtless seen much of the Divine glory before: they had seen God's wisdom, power, and goodness in the creation and government of the world. But they never before had such a view of his condescension and grace as when they beheld him lying in the manger, a helpless babe. Now also the design of God to glorify all his perfections in the work of redemption was more clearly unfolded. Hence the whole multitude of the heavenly choir began to sing, "Glory to God in the highest." And if their hosannas increased with their discoveries of the Divine glory, should not ours also? Have not we also abundant reason to magnify our incarnate God; and to exalt our thoughts of him in proportion as he has debased himself for our sakes?]

2. It opens a way for our reconciliation with God—

[Men were indeed accepted of God before Christ's advent in the flesh; but it was through him who was to come, as we are accepted through him who has come. But when Christ was manifested in the flesh, his mediatorial work commenced; and that course of sufferings and obedience, which is the meritorious ground of our acceptance, was begun. It may be said, that, though we are bound on this account to adore him, the angels feel no interest in it. But can we suppose that those benevolent spirits, who minister to the heirs of salvation, and bear them on their wings to the realms of glory, feel no delight in our happiness? Doubtless they do; and are themselves made happier by their sympathy with us. If they rejoice over one sinner that repenteth, they also have reason to adore the Saviour for opening both to us and them such an inexhaustible fountain of blessedness and joy.]

3. It reunites men and angels under one Head—

[Christ was the Creator and sovereign Lord both of men and angels¹; but man, by casting off his allegiance to his Lord, lost also his connexion with angels. Jesus however, by becoming man, gathers together *again*^m both men and angels under himself as their common head: yea, he comes, as it were, to the very gates of hell, that he may take from thence sinners of the human race to fill the thrones once vacated by the apostate angels. It is by no means improbable that the very same humiliation of Jesus that exalts men to glory, is the source of establishment to the angels that retained their

¹ Col. i. 16.

^m Ἀνα-κεφαλαιώσασθαι. Eph. i. 10.

innocence. At all events, the restoration of their Lord to the honour of which man by transgression had deprived him, and their communion with man in the benefits conferred upon him, cannot fail of exciting in their breasts the liveliest emotions of gratitude. Indeed, we see that this is no fanciful idea, since it is realized in heaven, where saints and angels join in one general chorus, ascribing "salvation to God and to the Lambⁿ."]

TO ENFORCE then the injunction we have been considering, we would say,

1. Welcome him—

[Let not his advent be regarded with indifference; but welcome him with acclamations and hosannas. The captious Pharisees may indeed condemn you; but if you neglect to honour him thus, the very stones will cry out against you^o.]

2. Submit to him—

[Jesus comes, not merely to save mankind, but to set up his kingdom in the world. Let your hearts then, yea, "the very thoughts of your hearts, be brought into a willing captivity to him." "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish^p:" and present your offerings before him in token of your allegiance to him, and your unreserved subjection to his will^q.]

3. Depend upon him—

[He is that nail in a sure place on which are to be hanged all the vessels of his Father's house^r. Trust then on him; and let his vicarious sufferings and obedience be the stay and support of your souls.]

4. Glory in him—

[Since he is the boast of all in heaven, let him be the boast of all on earth. Let the frame of your hearts be joyous, exulting, and triumphant^s. Thus from worshipping him here below, you shall be brought to worship him for evermore in heaven above.]

ⁿ Rev. v. 9, 13.

^o Luke xix. 38—40.

^p Ps. ii. 12.

^q Matt. ii. 11.

^r Isai. xxii. 23, 24.

^s See Isai. xlv. 23.

MMCLXX.

EXCELLENCY OF CHRIST'S PERSON AND GOVERNMENT.

Heb. i. 8. *Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever : a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.*

IN the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Apostle's main object is to shew, that the Jewish ritual was completely fulfilled in Christ, and was therefore superseded by the Christian dispensation. But before he comes to the argumentative part, wherein this subject is regularly discussed, he shews how great and glorious a person Christ was : for, as the Jews had a high regard for Moses, and as they had received their law from God, it was necessary that they should be informed who Christ was ; that he was greater than Moses, yea, than the very angels in heaven ; and that therefore he had full authority to introduce the religion which was now established amongst his followers, and which the Jews were every where called upon to embrace. This, however, he takes care to ground upon their own Scriptures. He speaks of nothing as now, for the first time, revealed to himself ; but appeals to the writings of their own prophets, in proof of every thing that he asserts.

The Psalm from whence the text is cited, relates chiefly to the Messiah. Whatever relation it may have to Solomon, it confessedly cannot be altogether applied to him. The ancient Jews understood it as speaking of the Messiah : and of the propriety of applying it to him, there can be no doubt. The words before us are addressed by the Father to the Messiah : and they lead us distinctly to notice two things ; namely,

I. The dignity of his person—

Many there are, both Jews and Christians, who deny that the Divinity of Christ is here asserted—

[Jews have said, that the word Elohim is applied in Scripture to creatures, and therefore cannot be justly interpreted as

importing the proper Deity of the person to whom it is addressed. But to this it may be observed, that though the word Elohim is applied to magistrates *officially*, as representatives of the Deity, it is no where applied to any individual but to Jehovah himself; and that to apply it to any individual besides Jehovah would be blasphemy.

But Christians also have attempted to invalidate the testimony of the Apostle, as the Jews have of the prophet; and for that purpose would translate the words thus; “God is thy throne for ever and ever.” But this is to force the words from their plain and obvious meaning: nor will it answer the end which they would endeavour to attain: for the very next quotation from the Psalms asserts the divinity of Christ, as clearly as the text itself does; speaking of him as the Creator of all things, and as continuing immutably “the same” for ever and ever^a: and just before the text, another passage is cited from the Psalms to the same purpose, saying, “Let all the angels of God worship him^b.” We may safely therefore affirm, that the Messiah (who is here called “the Son,”) is addressed as truly and properly “God.”]

But the doctrine of his proper Deity, whilst it is asserted here, pervades also the whole Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament—

[The very name Emmanuel was assigned him on this account, because he was “God with us.” Yes, verily, he is “Jehovah’s fellow^c,” even “the mighty God^d,” “Jehovah our righteousness^e.” Nor does the New Testament leave this in doubt: for it asserts him to be “God manifest in the flesh^f,” even “the great God and our Saviour^g,” “God over all, blessed for ever^h.”]

And this doctrine lies at the root of all our hopes—

[The whole scope of this epistle is to shew, that what the blood of bulls and goats could not do, the blood of Christ, as shed upon the cross, has effected; namely, that it has made a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. But is it the blood of a mere creature that could effect this? If Christ be a mere creature, what force is there in that argument of the Apostle, “If the blood of bulls, &c. sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, &c. purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living Godⁱ?” What sense would there be in this, “If the blood of one creature could effect the smallest thing, *how much more*

^a ver. 10—12.

^d Isai. ix. 6.

^g Tit. ii. 14.

^b ver. 6.

^e Jer. xxiii. 6.

^h Rom. ix. 5.

^c Zech. xiii. 7.

^f 1 Tim. iii. 16.

ⁱ Heb. ix. 13, 14.

shall the blood of another creature effect the greatest?" But if Christ be God as well as man, then is the argument clear, and worthy of an inspired Apostle. In a word, if Christ be not God, he cannot be the Saviour revealed in the Old Testament: for of him it is expressly said, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour: there is none beside me^k."]

But it is not so much of the essential, as of the mediatorial, dignity of Christ that the text speaks: for it immediately proceeds to mark,

II. The excellency of his kingdom—

Earthly kingdoms are but of a limited duration: and, from the imperfection of all human institutions, there must of necessity be something in them of partiality and of comparative oppression. But Christ's kingdom is perfect in every respect: it is,

1. In its duration perpetual—

[The four great monarchies all found a termination of their power^l: but the kingdom which Christ has established, shall endure for ever^m. True it is, that the present mode of administering it will cease, when there are no more subjects to be governed, or enemies to be subdued. When the final judgment is passed, the enemies of the Messiah's kingdom will all be shut up in the prison prepared for their reception; and his subjects be exalted to those regions, where their every want will be supplied. "Then the Son will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, that God may be all in allⁿ." Still, however, the kingdom itself will remain: and Christ, as its glorious Head, be acknowledged by all his subjects, as the one source of their happiness, the one author of their salvation^o.]

2. In its administration just—

["His sceptre is a sceptre of righteousness." Every law that proceeds from him is "holy, and just, and good." Nothing of imperfection is found in any one of them: they are alike incapable of diminution or addition. If any one law appears too strict, it is only through our own ignorance and love of sin. To the renewed soul, not one of his commandments is grievous: the only thing that is grievous to it is, that it is not

^k Isai. xlv. 21, 22.

^l Dan. ii. 37—41.

^m Dan. ii. 44. and vii. 13, 14.

ⁿ 1 Cor. xv. 24, 28.

^o Rev. v. 9, 10.

able to obey them all more perfectly. The very tendency of every law is to make those happy who obey it: and were any man to obey the laws of Christ as perfectly as they do in heaven, he would already in his own soul possess a heaven upon earth. Let any one who is disposed to complain of the strictness of the Gospel, examine its laws with candour, and see which of them he can reduce: Would he love God with *less* than *all* his heart; or his neighbour *less* than himself? Were he to reduce any one law below its present standard, he would so far give a licence for rebellion throughout all the kingdoms of the earth, and reason for murmuring throughout all the regions of hell, since a lower standard was appointed for others than was ever allowed to them.

But this righteousness is no less visible in the administration of the King, than in the laws by which he governs: for in no one instance is his favour or his frown accorded to any one, but in a strict consistency with equity. On whom did the King ever frown but on account of his transgressions, or more than in proportion to their enormity? or on whom did he ever deign to smile, but on those who humbled themselves before him as guilty, and pleaded his perfect righteousness as the ground of all their hopes? Nay, where did he ever pardon one rebel, till that rebel had cast himself entirely on the merit of his sacrifice, whereby Divine justice had been satisfied, and the law of God magnified? In earth, in hell, in heaven, the righteousness of his sceptre is alike displayed, and to all eternity shall it be acknowledged throughout the whole extent of his dominions.]

Keeping in view the general scope of the passage, as well as our own individual benefit, we would observe by way of IMPROVEMENT,

1. How clearly are the great truths of the Gospel founded on the Old Testament!

[We find nothing in the New Testament which was not predicted in the Old. Hence our blessed Lord and his Apostles continually refer to the Jewish Scriptures in confirmation of their own word. And it is worthy of particular remark, that we never so much as once hear of their enemies controverting or objecting to the construction which they put upon the Scriptures. The true import of the prophecies was, in many respects, better understood then than now; because the Jews, in order to justify their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah, have laboured to find out other interpretations of the Scriptures, different from those which their own forefathers acknowledged and approved. And I cannot but regard the very circumstance of the Apostles citing the different prophecies in

the way they did, as a strong presumption, that the Scriptures were understood at that time in the very sense in which they cited them: for, had they not been so understood by the Jews of that day, the citation of them would have been nugatory: yea, worse than nugatory; it would have been absurd in the highest degree; and would have produced the directly opposite effect to that which it was intended to produce. Let any one, with this impression upon his mind, read the chapter from whence our text is taken, and he cannot for one moment doubt the divinity of Christ, or the truth of his Messiahship.]

2. How safely may we commit ourselves into the Saviour's hands!

[Were our King a man only, what confidence could we have in his protection? He could not be every where: he could not hear and aid all persons at the same moment: consequently we might be overwhelmed before he could come to our aid. But our King is "the Mighty God," who has all things in heaven, and earth, and hell under his controul; and who has engaged that all his enemies, and ours, shall be put under his feet. Let none then be discouraged because of the number, power, or inveteracy of their enemies: for, if he be for us, none can successfully be against us. Let the consideration therefore which quieted David's mind in all his troubles, compose and quiet our minds also under every trial that can befall us: "the floods have lifted, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice: the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea^p:" "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven^q."]

3. How obedient should we be to his holy will!

[Were it only that we are the work of his hands, we ought to be altogether obedient to his will: but how much more, when, in addition to being our Creator, he has become our Redeemer; and has assumed our nature, in order that we, through his vicarious sufferings, may be made partakers of his kingdom and glory! We must not forget that the throne on which he sits is a mediatorial throne; and the kingdom which he governs is a mediatorial kingdom: and that he exercises his dominion not merely *over* us, but *for* us. How happy would the fallen angels be, if they could have one more offer of being received into his kingdom! But this privilege belongs to us only; and to us no longer than during the present short period of our existence upon earth. If we cast not down the weapons of our rebellion now, the day of grace will be past, and we shall

^p Ps. xciii. 3, 4.

^q Ps. xi. 3, 4.

hear him say, "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me." But methinks we should be constrained by love, rather than by fear. Think, my brethren, what it has cost him to establish his kingdom: what conflicts he has endured for us, that we might be made partakers of his triumphs! It was "through his own death that he triumphed over him that had the power of death, and delivered us from his cruel bondage." Give ye then up yourselves to him: and though death should await you for your fidelity to him, fear it not, but rejoice that ye are counted worthy to suffer it for his sake. And know assuredly, that, "if ye suffer with him, ye shall reign with him," and to all eternity "be glorified together" with him.]

MMCLXXI.

CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO ANGELS.

Heb. i. 10—12. *Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: they shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.*

THE Old Testament speaks much of Christ: the Psalms, in particular, abound with expressions relating to him: and, previous to his coming, the learned Jews, who looked forward to the advent of their Messiah, and longed for his appearance, interpreted them in their true and proper sense. This is clear; because we never find, in any one instance, that the construction put upon these passages by the Apostles of our Lord was controverted, or the application of them to him doubted. The Jews of later ages, in order to weaken the force of these passages as proving the Messiahship of the Lord Jesus, have invented other explanations of them; determining to put any sense whatever upon their own Scriptures, rather than admit the validity of his claims. But it is not to be conceived that the Apostle Paul, at the very time that he withheld the signature of his name from this epistle, (lest, by the mention of it, he should excite the prejudices of his

countrymen to whom he wrote,) should, in the very outset of his epistle, cite passages in a sense which none of his opponents were ready to admit; and that he should go on to build the whole weight of his arguments on passages so adduced, and so interpreted. Yet we find, that he has applied to Jesus many expressions, which, if his construction of them be true, prove, beyond a doubt, not only the Messiahship of Jesus, but the infinite superiority of his dispensation to that which had been established among the Jews. The Jews gloried in the Mosaic dispensation, as having been given to them, not only by the hands of Moses, but through the instrumentality of angels^a. St. Paul shews them, in the beginning of this epistle, that, however much they might glory in this honour, the Christian had far higher reason to glory; because *his* religion was revealed by Christ himself, who, both *in his nature* as God, and *in his office* as the appointed Mediator between God and man, was infinitely above the angels.

In confirmation of the Apostle's statement, I shall set before you,

I. The majesty of Him by whom the Gospel was revealed—

Great and glorious things are spoken of him in the preceding context. But we shall wave all mention of those things, and confine our attention to the passage before us; and notice,

1. The passage cited by the Apostle—

[The words in my text will be found towards the close of the 102d Psalm. In that psalm, the writer, personating the Church, speaks of the afflictions under which he groaned^b, and of the consolations which he derived from contemplating the future glories of the Messiah's kingdom, which should extend over the whole world, and endure for evermore^c. The person of whom he speaks, he calls "his God:" "I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my years:" and

^a Heb. ii. 3. Acts vii. 53. Gal. iii. 19.

^b Ps. cii. 1—11.

^c Ps. cii. 12—28. He speaks of "the heathen fearing the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth beholding his glory: and of a people who should be created to praise the Lord." ver. 15, 18, 22.

then he immediately adds, "Of old hast thou laid the foundations of the earth," and so on. Now, no one ever doubted but the Person whom the Psalmist there addresses, was the God of heaven and earth: and the Jews themselves were wont to interpret the psalm as referring to the Messiah. St. Paul confirms that interpretation, by expressly applying the text to the Lord Jesus Christ. As for saying that he applied the passage to Christ in a subordinate sense, there is no intimation given of any such thing: nor would the passage have been at all to his purpose, if it were not understood in its full sense: for the Apostle's object was, to establish the superiority of *Christ* above all the angels of heaven: and to have asserted that the *Father* was superior to them, would have been of no use. It is clear, then, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the true God, even "God over all, blessed for ever."]

2. The sublime truths contained in it—

[The Person here addressed has two attributes ascribed to him; namely, *omnipotence*, as the Creator of the universe; and *immutability*, as being ever the same: and both of these belong to the Lord Jesus Christ; for it was He who created all things, both in heaven and earth. If an idea be suggested, that he might have merely been an agent deputed to this work, as any angel might have been; and that the execution of it is not sufficient to prove his Godhead; I answer, that though I will not undertake to say what works God might devolve on a creature, there can be no doubt but that he was God who made the worlds: for it is said, "In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God; and the *Word was God*: the same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by HIM; and without HIM was not any thing made that was made^d." And this was no other than the Lord Jesus Christ: for the same Apostle adds, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us^e."

To the same Person, also, is immutability ascribed: as it is said, "They (the works of creation) shall perish, but thou remainest: and they all shall wax old, as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail. Now this, also, is an incommunicable attribute of the Deity! "I, the Lord, change not." To no creature whatever can this perfection be assigned: the highest archangel, if left to himself, would fail, even as myriads of once-holy angels did in heaven; from whence they were expelled for their transgression, and were doomed to an eternity of misery in hell. But to Jesus it essentially belongs; because, though a man, as to

^d John i. 1—3.

^e John i. 14.

his human nature, he is “Jehovah’s Fellow,” “God manifest in the flesh,” “Emmanuel, God with us.”]

The whole scope of the Apostle’s argument leads me, from speaking of the Majesty of Christ, to shew, in the next place,

II. The excellency of the Gospel as revealed by him—

Why, when the Law was committed to us by the ministry of angels, should the Gospel be spoken to us by God himself? Is there any thing in the Gospel that calls for such a distinction? I answer, There is an immense disparity between the two, even such as may well account for the high honour conferred upon the Gospel. Consider what the Gospel is: consider,

1. The depth of its mysteries—

[The law was not without its mysteries: but they were all veiled from human sight; in token of which, Moses put a veil upon his face. But “in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, that veil is taken away,” and we behold his glory with unveiled face^f. We are led even to the council-chamber of the Most High, where the Father and the Son concerted together for the recovery of mankind, even millions of years before they fell. We hear the Son undertaking to become a man, in order that he might suffer in the stead of his offending creatures, and expiate their guilt by his own obedience unto death. We see this very Saviour become incarnate: we behold him sojourning on earth, as the accredited Ambassador of heaven. We hear his voice; we trace his footsteps; we witness all his sufferings unto death. We see him yet again, raised from the dead, and ascending up to heaven; and sending down the Holy Ghost, to testify of him, and to establish his kingdom upon earth. We behold his kingdom actually established, and maintaining its pre-eminence on earth, in despite of all possible opposition from men and devils. And, finally, we behold in this stupendous mystery every perfection of the Deity, shining in harmonious and united splendour.

Here then was a mystery, which deserved to be marked with all the honour conferred upon it. True, “this treasure” might well, at a subsequent period, be put “into earthen vessels:” but at its first exhibition it was well that it should be displayed by our incarnate God, and that the word which

^f 2 Cor. iii. 14, 18.

unfolded it should "at first begin to be spoken by the Lord himself^g."

2. The richness of its provisions—

[In this is contained all that man can need, and all that God himself can bestow. We were fallen, even our whole race, like the apostate angels themselves: and being partakers with them in transgression, we were doomed to partake with them also in their punishment. We were sunk even to the very precincts of hell: yet, behold, from thence are we taken, to be restored to the favour of our God, and to inherit a throne of glory. Could we conceive of the fallen angels, as taken from their sad abodes of misery, and restored to the felicity from which they fell, we might have some idea of the blessings imparted to us by the Gospel of Christ. But who can declare all that is comprehended in pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory? Eternity itself will not be sufficient to compute and estimate the mighty sum.]

3. The duration of its benefits—

[Eternity! Amazing thought! eternity! Yes, eternity shall be the duration of blessedness to every believing soul. The benefits of the Mosaic dispensation soon passed away: but not so those which we inherit by the Gospel. As long as the believing soul shall retain its capacity for enjoyment, and the Saviour himself exist upon his throne, so long shall He who bought us with his blood, dispense to us all the blessings that he has purchased for us: and the inheritance that shall be accorded to us, shall be "incorruptible, and undefiled, and one that fadeth not away."]

Observe, then, from this subject,

1. How worthy of acceptance is the Gospel of Christ!

[When we consider who it is that has proclaimed the Gospel to us, even "the true and faithful Witness," the Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot entertain a doubt either of its truth or excellency. Take all the promises and invitations; take them in all their freeness, and in all their fulness; which of them is not worthy to be embraced with our whole hearts, and to be relied upon with our whole souls? Well did St. Paul say of the Gospel, "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance." O that we could receive it as we ought! O that we felt our need of it, and that we were duly mindful of the authority and veracity of Him who has revealed it to us! We should not then dare to slight it; nor should we hesitate to rest in it with most implicit confidence.]

^g Heb. ii. 3.

2. How worthless are all things, in comparison of it !

[Let crowns and kingdoms be put into the balance against it, and they will all be found lighter than vanity itself. What is become of all that the greatest monarchs ever enjoyed? It is vanished away as a dream. And what will soon become of the whole world? It will all pass away, as a morning cloud; and be as though it had never been. Of this we are all sensible; but yet we find it difficult to realize our own principles. In opposition to our better judgment, we are carried away after some worthless objects, which often elude our grasp; or, if enjoyed, are no sooner possessed than they perish. But if we seek for Jesus and his kingdom, all will be secured to us. No one ever sought eternal things in earnest, and was disappointed of his hope: no one ever suffered loss for them, but he found it to be gain in the end. To all then, I say, "Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you; for him hath God the Father sealed."]

MMCCLXXII.

THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS.

Heb. i. 14. *Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*

THE superiority of Christ to angels occupies the mind of the Apostle throughout this chapter. He has illustrated it already in a very convincing way. He has adduced many passages of Holy Writ which confessedly belong to the Messiah; and has shewn, that they never have been, nor can be, applied to *them*, because the things predicated in them, exclusively belong to *him*. The representations given of the angels necessarily imply a great inferiority to him: for they are commanded to worship him^a, as their Creator^b, and their God^c. Nor is it him only whom they serve: they are the servants of his people also, appointed by him to that very office, and executing it for his honour and glory. This the Apostle mentions as an indisputable fact; and appeals to the

^a ver. 6.

^b ver. 10—12.

^c ver. 8.

Hebrews themselves respecting it: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

The ministry of angels is not only a curious subject as it relates to them, but a very interesting subject as it relates to us; since we, if we be heirs of salvation, are the very persons for whom they minister. We propose therefore to consider the ministry of angels,

I. As evinced in their services for God's people of old—

They are called by the Apostle "ministering spirits," which designates at once both their nature and office. In their nature they are not corporeal, but spiritual beings: and they possess both wisdom and strength far beyond any of the sons of men^d. Their number was once far greater than it at present is; for vast multitudes of them "kept not their first estate, but left their first habitation, and are reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day^e." Those who have held fast their integrity are called "the elect angels;" and of them there are myriads, yea millions without number^f. Amongst them are different ranks and orders, (as there are also amongst the fallen angels,) under Michael their head, who is therefore called "the archangel," whilst they are called "*his* angels^g."

On God they wait, as his servants, with the utmost alacrity and zeal^h: and by him they are employed in executing his holy will.

They were employed by him at the promulgation of his lawⁱ: and they have been rendered useful also in the diffusion of his Gospel^k.

By him they have been sent forth both as executioners of his vengeance and as dispensers of his mercies. By an angel, he slew in one hour the whole

^d 2 Sam. xiv. 20. 2 Pet. ii. 11.

^e Jude, ver. 6.

^f Ps. lxviii. 17. Rev. v. 11. Heb. xii. 22.

^g Jude, ver. 9. Rev. xii. 7.

^h Ps. ciii. 20, 21.

ⁱ Acts vii. 53. Deut. xxxiii. 2.

^k Rev. xiv. 6.

Egyptian first-born both of men and beasts¹. By the agency of one of those powerful spirits was the pestilence produced, to which, for the punishment of David's sin, seventy thousand Israelites fell victims^m. It was by a sword wielded by a similar messenger from God, that one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian host also were slain in one nightⁿ. Nor is it in such extensive ravages only that they have been employed: a single individual, whom God has ordained to punish for his iniquity, has been the object of a similar commission, and been made to feel the weight of an angel's avenging arm: an angel smote Herod for his pride, and he was eaten up of worms^o. In like manner they have been frequently made God's ministers for good. In the instances already mentioned they proved signal benefactors, no less than avengers: for, if they smote the enemies of God, they effected thereby a great deliverance for Israel: and if they corrected his people, it was with a view to humble them, and to bring them to repentance. But they have been no less willing to minister to individuals than to a whole nation: nor have they accounted any office beneath their attention. Was Abraham's steward sent to seek a wife for Isaac? an angel went before him to prepare his way^p. Did Hagar flee from the face of her mistress? an angel advised her to return^q. And when she was put away by Abraham, and her child was perishing with thirst, an angel directed her to a well, where she might find an immediate supply^r. Were Lot and his family in danger of perishing in Sodom? with what affectionate solicitude did angels go to bring them forth from that devoted place^s! Does Balaam hasten to curse Israel? an angel obstructs his way, and does not suffer him to proceed, till he engages to utter nothing but what the Lord shall put into his mouth^t. Does the highly-favoured Daniel pour out his soul

¹ Exod. xii. 23. ^m 2 Sam. xxiv. 16, 17. ⁿ Isai. xxxvii. 36.

^o Acts xii. 23. ^p Gen. xxiv. 7. ^q Gen. xvi. 7—9.

^r Gen. xxi. 17. ^s Gen. xix. 1, 11, 15—17.

^t Numb. xxii. 22—35.

before God in prayer ? an angel flies from the highest heavens to give him assured intelligence of the acceptance of his prayers^u.

Under the New Testament dispensation also, we find them alike attentive to the welfare of God's people. Is the child Jesus in danger of being involved in the common ruin of the infants whom Herod slew ? an angel appears to Joseph, and directs him to flee to Egypt with his wife and child^x. Is Peter kept in prison to be brought forth the very next day for execution ? an angel opens for him the prison doors, and liberates him from his confinement^y. Is Paul ready to be overwhelmed in the waves of the tempestuous ocean ? an angel comes to assure him, that both he, and for his sake all the ship's company also, shall be saved^z.

We might adduce a great many other instances of their friendly interposition for the people of God : but sufficient has been spoken to shew, that the office of ministering to the saints has not been assigned to them on one or two occasions only of extraordinary magnitude, but that it has been in every successive age their uniform and willing employment.

By the view we have taken of their ministry in former times, we shall be prepared to contemplate it,

II. As still exercised towards the heirs of salvation—

The vision of Jacob's ladder, with the angels ascending and descending upon it, is still realized throughout the world, even as our blessed Lord has taught us to expect it should be^a. As soon as we embrace the Gospel, we are brought into actual communion with them, even with that "innumerable company of them" that are before the throne of God^b. But, as ubiquity is the prerogative of God only, there are some who have a special charge of particular saints, and whose office it is to watch over them in a more especial manner^c.

^u Dan. ix. 21—23.

^x Matt. ii. 13.

^y Acts xii. 7.

^z Acts xxvii. 23.

^a Gen. xxviii. 12. John i. 51.

^b Heb. xii. 22.

^c Matt. xviii. 10. and Acts xii. 15.

They have still, as formerly, a great concern for the Gospel, desiring to get a deeper insight into it themselves^d, and longing for a diffusion of it throughout the world. As the first promulgation of it was to them an occasion of joy and triumph, insomuch that they left their bright abodes in heaven, and came down, a whole multitude of them, to earth on purpose to proclaim it^e; so the acceptance of it by any single individual is to them a source of unutterable joy: not even the glory of the Divine presence so attracts their notice, but they can with pleasure turn away their eyes to behold a mourning penitent; nor is their felicity in God himself so perfect, but it receives an addition from this blissful sight^f. From the moment that any one receives the Gospel aright, they become his servants, and wait upon him with unwearied assiduity. "They encamp around him" when he is stationary^g, and go out with him where-soever he goes, in order to "hold him up in their hands, lest he dash his foot against a stone^h." Nor is it about his corporeal welfare only that they are concerned: they are attentive also to the concerns of his soul, and oftentimes succour him in his conflicts, even as they did his Lord and Master, who, we are expressly told, had "an angel sent from heaven to strengthen him" when agonizing in the gardenⁱ. What was then accomplished in the Head, is doubtless yet daily wrought in the members also: for as "He was tempted in all things like as we are," so shall we be succoured in all things like as he was^k. In a dying hour, more especially, they redouble their attentions; and wait with tender solicitude the departure of the spirit, that they may bear it on their wings to heaven into the very presence of their God. Nor do they render this service only to men of higher rank and quality: they minister with equal pleasure to the least and meanest of mankind: if there be a Lazarus so poor as to subsist only on the crumbs that

^d 1 Pet. i. 12.^e Luke ii. 13, 14.^f Luke xv. 10.^g Ps. xxxiv. 7.^h Ps. xci. 11, 12.ⁱ Luke xxii. 43.^k John vi. 57.

fall from a rich man's table, and so destitute of friends that the very dogs surround him to lick his sores¹, they will perform the same office for him as freely as for the greatest monarch upon earth.

Beyond this life too will they afford us their kind services: for, when our bodies, after having mouldered into dust, shall again be raised in the last day, these benevolent agents will employ themselves in gathering together the dispersed saints from every quarter of the globe, and in bearing them into the presence of their Lord and Saviour^m. The separation of the tares from the wheat will be effected by them: and, whilst the tares are bound up by them in bundles, and cast into the fire that never shall be quenched, the wheat shall be gathered by them, and carried into the granary of heavenⁿ. O fearful thought to the ungodly, to find those benevolent spirits the instruments of their destruction, when they might, but for their own fault, have secured them as agents for their welfare! But to the saints how joyful the contemplation, that those elder brethren who never fell, will so exult in, and contribute to, the recovery of our apostate race!

Their services will now be ended, because we shall then no longer have any occasion for their aid. But the expressions of their love will never end: for, having seen with joy our fruition of redeeming love, they will unite with us in songs of praise to our redeeming God for ever and ever^o.

IMPROVEMENT—

1. How desirable is it to be found amongst “the heirs of salvation!”

[To be heirs of great estates we all account desirable; but to be “heirs of salvation,” how few of us regard as an object worthy of any serious attention! The very character of an heir of salvation, so far from being estimable in the eyes of the generality, is despised; and the names by which such a person is designated in Scripture, are made terms of reproach. “The elect,” “the saints,” “the godly,” are names in the

¹ Luke xvi. 21, 22.

^m Matt. xxiv. 30, 31.

ⁿ Matt. xiii. 30.

^o Rev. v. 9—13.

estimation of the world equivalent to hypocrites and fanatics. Such, however, is not the opinion of the holy angels. When once we are brought into that family of which Christ is the head, they love us, they honour us, they serve us; yea, they account it their highest honour to minister unto us. Let me then exhort all of you, my brethren, to defer to the judgment of those, who must confessedly be so much better judges than yourselves: for it is not the angels only who thus express their sentiments, but God also, who assigns to them this very office, and sends them forth for the execution of it. And, if men treat us with contempt because we prefer an invisible and eternal inheritance before one that is visible and temporal, "let us not be ashamed, but let us glorify God on this behalf^p."

Does any one ask, How shall I become an heir of salvation? I answer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," and "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart:" for then shall ye be children of the living God^q: and, "if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ^r;" who, if he is "the Saviour of all men, is especially the Saviour of them that believe^s."]

2. How awful will it be to be found amongst the opposers of God's people!

[Little did the persecuting Saul think whom he opposed, when he laboured to destroy the followers of Christ. He imagined that his efforts were directed only against a number of wild enthusiasts: but, when he heard the Lord Jesus Christ himself expostulating with him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME?" he saw his error, and learned, that "whoso toucheth God's people, toucheth the apple of his eye^t." Nor are the angels indifferent about the treatment which is shewn to the objects of their care. Of this we are assured expressly by our Lord himself: and we desire your particular attention to this point.

Our Lord, in order to inculcate the great doctrine of humility, exhorted his Disciples to imitate a little child, which, for the more effectually impressing of the lesson upon their minds, he had set in the midst of them. He then declared, that whoso should offend one of the little ones who believed in him, it would be better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. And the reason which he assigns is very remarkable: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, that in heaven *their angels do always behold the*

^p 1 Pet. iv. 16.

^q John i. 12. Gal. iv. 26, 29.

^r Rom. viii. 17.

^s 1 Tim. iv. 10.

^t Zech. ii. 8.

face of my Father which is in heaven^u." What is the meaning of this? and what is the force of this menace? The foregoing subject will explain it. The meaning is this. The least and meanest of God's people have one or more angels peculiarly interested about them in heaven: and, when they see the injuries done to the objects of their care, they cry to God in their behalf for vengeance; "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge their cause^x?" And then, as "they do continually his commandments, *hearkening unto the voice of his word*," they wait for the first intimation of the Divine will, and are ready to execute without delay the judgment which God assigns: and, if there were an hundred and eighty-five thousand of those enemies, they should all be "eaten up with worms," as Herod was, or be cut off, like the Assyrian host, in one single night. And let us mark particularly the extent of this admonition. It is not said, Take heed that ye do not *destroy* my people; but, that ye do not "*despise*" them; that ye despise not "*one*" of them; not one of "*these little ones*," however mean and despicable he may appear; for he has an avenger in heaven: and the vengeance he will inflict is far more terrible than being drowned in the depths of the sea; for into the depths of hell shall he cast your *soul*, the very instant he has inflicted the fatal stroke upon your body. Ah! brethren, will ye not tremble at this menace? Will ye still account it a light matter either outwardly to deride, or *inwardly to despise*, a child of God? Beware, I pray you, of your impending danger: and, if ye will not seek to become heirs of salvation yourselves, at your peril lift not up your finger against one that is. If this be *man's* threatening, disregard it; but, if it be *God's*, know that ye cannot hope for success in fighting against God.]

3. How excellent a work is that of ministering to the saints!

[It has been shewn that this is an office which even the angels themselves affect. And that they do perform it, is *not merely asserted* in our text, but *assumed* as a fact that is undoubted and unquestionable: "*Are they not ministering spirits? are they not all sent forth to minister for them that shall be heirs of salvation?*" Is there so much as one amongst them all that accounts himself *too high* to wait upon the *least and lowest* of the human race? If then such be *their* employment, see what an honourable office those amongst ourselves sustain who are labouring *in any way* for the good of souls! They are fellow-workers with angels, yea, and fellow-workers with God also. Engage then in this good work, all of you,

^u Matt. xviii. 6, 10.

^x Rev. vi. 10.

according to your ability; knowing that, “if ye are to do good unto all men, ye are especially to do it unto them that are of the household of faith^y.” Do it then in every possible way^z — — — And the more ye resemble the angels here, the more richly shall ye participate their felicity in a better world.]

^y Gal. vi. 10.

^z Here recommend the *Bible Society*, or *Mission Societies*, or *Jews' Society*, or *Charity Schools*, or *Visiting Societies*, or *Charities of any kind*, as occasion may require.

MMCLXXIII.

GREATNESS OF THE GOSPEL SALVATION.

Heb. ii. 3. *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?*

TO estimate our privileges aright, we should compare them, not with those of the heathen world, but with those enjoyed by God's ancient people the Jews. These were favoured with a revelation from heaven, and with ordinances of divine appointment, whereby they were to obtain acceptance with God. But their dispensation was burthensome beyond measure; their laws were executed with a rigour that was extreme; insomuch, that a man was stoned to death for only gathering a few sticks upon the Sabbath-day^a. In fact, any *presumptuous* violation of the law, attested by two or three witnesses, brought with it the punishment of death^b. Now, when it is considered how very different a dispensation we live under, it may well be asked, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” For surely, if a dispensation introduced by angels only required such strict attention, and was so inexorably enforced, much more must the Gospel dispensation, introduced as it has been by God's only dear Son, and attested by the Holy Ghost, demand attention and observance from all to whom it is revealed.

The words which I have read, will lead me to shew you,

^a Numb. xv. 32.

^b Numb. xv. 30.

I. The greatness of the Gospel dispensation—

To learn *what the Gospel salvation is*, we are referred to the preaching of our blessed Lord and his Apostles—

[Our blessed Lord did not *systematically* lay down the whole nature of the Gospel salvation; but he opened it with a sufficient clearness, that those who paid due attention to his word might easily comprehend it. What, for instance, could be plainer than the instruction given to Nicodemus, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life?” Here the perishing condition of the whole world is declared, and the means of their deliverance; namely, through the death of Christ as an atonement for sin, and by the simple exercise of faith in him^d. The same truth was repeatedly declared to others^e — — — and it was fully announced, that, as he completed in himself the whole of the Mosaic ritual, he was the only medium of access to God, the only Saviour of the world: “I am the truth, the way, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me^f.”

His Apostles after him preached the very same doctrine; and *to it, as preached by them, the Holy Ghost set his seal*. When Peter opened the Gospel *to the Jews*, he bade them believe in Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins; and in like manner when he opened it to the Gentiles: and on each occasion the Holy Ghost bare witness to it, by a visible descent from heaven^g. So Paul also preached, and with the same effect, to the people at Antioch, and to the Jailor at Philippi^h. In a word, this was the Gospel which they all preached; and by this they prevailed, to establish the kingdom of Christ throughout the greater part of the known worldⁱ.]

But how shall I declare *the greatness of this salvation*?

[Consider it *as imparted to us*; who shall estimate the blessings of it? Take it either separately or collectively; and tell me if you, or an angel from heaven, can ever calculate the value of pardon, and peace, and holiness, and glory? — — — Eternity would be too short to count the mighty sum. But consider it *as purchased for us*; there all efforts to

^c John iii. 14, 15.

^d See also ver. 16, 18, 36.

^e John vi. 51. xi. 25, 26. xii. 32, 33. and Matt. xxvi. 27, 28.

^f John xiv. 6.

^g Acts ii. 38, 39. and x. 43, 44.

^h Acts xiii. 38, 39. and xvi. 30, 31.

ⁱ Mark xvi. 15, 16.

estimate it aright are altogether vain. What shall I say of the incarnation of God's only dear Son, and of his substitution in the place of sinners? What shall I say of his obedience unto death; and of his working out a righteousness, wherein every sinner in the universe, if only he believed in Jesus, might stand accepted before God? It is evident that the theme is too vast either for men or angels; and that "the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of this love can never be fully comprehended," or adequately explored^k.]

Well, then, may we now be prepared to hear of,

II. The danger of neglecting it—

Here an *appeal* is made to every living man; and sinners are made judges in their own cause. Only consider what is included in a neglect of the Gospel salvation:

1. What ingratitude!

[Did Almighty God so compassionate our fallen state as to give his only-begotten Son to stand in our place and stead, and by his own obedience unto death to rescue us from all the miseries we had deserved? — — — What shall be said of those on whom this stupendous act of grace makes no impression? If but a *man*, a *fellow-sinner*, had substituted himself in our place, and died for us by the hands of a public executioner, what would be thought of us if we felt no obligation to him? I put it then to *you*, What must God think of us, if we feel no desire to requite his unmerited and unbounded kindness to us, in giving his only dear Son to die for us? *I appeal* to all, May we not well expect to lose this salvation, if we are so indifferent about it, as to treat both it, and the means used to effect it, with neglect? — — — I cannot doubt what is the testimony which the conscience of every one before me is constrained to give.]

2. What unreasonableness!

[Who ever thinks of attaining the means without the end? You cannot obtain any thing in this life without some effort suited to the occasion. How can you hope, therefore, that heaven, and all its glory, shall ever be attained without some effort? If I had to require all the exertions that poor heathen devotees employ to secure the favour of their gods, it were highly reasonable that you should engage day and night in all the most self-denying services that could be prescribed. But when I have only to say, "Believe in Christ, and be saved," your

^k Eph. iii. 18, 19.

neglect is unreasonable in the highest degree. Suppose, when Moses erected the brazen serpent that all who looked to it might be healed, any had been so perverse as to say, 'No, I will not turn my head to look to it;' would you not say that such an one justly merited the death that must have ensued? Such then is the desert of you who neglect the Saviour: and I will leave you to judge, whether your unreasonable obstinacy, in refusing to comply with such easy means, do not justly cut you off from all hope of that salvation which he offers to you?]

3. What horrible impiety!

[I am afraid of putting this in its true point of view, lest you should think that I wish to aggravate your guilt beyond all due bounds. But the Apostle himself represents it as "a trampling under foot the Son of God, and putting him to an open shame, and doing despite unto the Spirit of grace." Now, suppose you could see this matter as God sees it. Suppose you could see the Lord Jesus Christ coming in person to that man, and the man turning upon him and trampling him under his feet: then suppose you saw the Holy Spirit also importuning and entreating him to accept of mercy, and the man turning his back upon him, and doing all manner of despite to him: should you think that man had any just ground to expect a salvation which he treated with such contempt? This, then, is the very light in which God places it, and in which you also ought to view it¹. You, in fact, say to God, 'It was needless to send thy Son for me: I did not want him; nor will I receive him: and if I am not to be saved but by him, I am determined to abide by the alternative: for I will rather perish in my sins, than be at the trouble of seeking salvation through him.' I think I need not put it to you, whether the damnation of such an obstinate sinner be just or not: I feel persuaded that the appeal made to you in my text has made its way to all your hearts; and that you see how vain it must be for any to hope to escape the displeasure of God, if they continue to treat with such neglect and contempt the wonderful salvation provided for them.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have neglected this salvation—

[I wish it to be particularly remembered, that whilst I address you, I do not lay to your charge any sin except that which is expressly specified in my text. I will grant, that, as far as any flagrant act of sin, you have been as innocent as you yourselves can affirm. But have you therefore committed no damning sin? Ask yourselves whether you have

¹ Heb. x. 28, 29.

not neglected the Gospel salvation. Ask whether, if any man had thought as little of his earthly business as you have thought of that, and had entered into his temporal concerns with as little ardour as you have into the concerns of your soul, he could reasonably have hoped for success? Yea, tell me, whether you yourselves would not have been ready to ascribe his failure to his neglect of business? You would not consider an occasional thought about his concerns sufficient, whilst yet he paid no just attention to them: and so, if you now and then, in a formal way, perform what you call your religious duties, whilst the concerns of eternity do not really occupy your souls, you must not imagine that you are free from the charge which my text imputes to you. Consider, I pray you, what salvation is; and how greatly you need it; and how it is to be sought; and what an entire devotion of soul is required in order to a due performance of that duty. Tell me, Have you, with deep contrition of heart, mourned and lamented your sins? Have you cried to the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, as if you felt really your perishing condition? Have you utterly renounced all hope in yourselves, and cast yourselves altogether upon him as your only hope? And is this still, at this very time, the daily habit of your mind? Nothing less than this is what the Gospel requires of you; nor without this can you ever enjoy the salvation which it has provided for you. I pray you, consider this well: and provide, if you can, an answer to *the appeal*, the awful appeal, which God himself here makes to you — — —]

2. Those who are really seeking after salvation—

[If you are seeking salvation altogether in and through Christ, then will I alter the words of my text, and ask, How shall you *not* escape, if you are *seeking* this great salvation? Be assured of this; the salvation is great enough to answer all your wants, and to satisfy all your desires. There is in Christ an inexhaustible fulness of all that you stand in need of; and out of that fulness you shall receive to the utmost extent of your necessities. If a doubt or fear arise in your minds, know that none ever perished looking unto Jesus. "To those who are in him, there never was, nor ever shall be, any condemnation^m." Every promise in the Bible secures to you the possession of that salvation. Are you blind, and guilty, and polluted, and enslaved? Behold, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and complete redemption, are made over to you in Christ Jesus, and shall be imparted in the measure that your necessities require. Enjoy then your liberty; and let the salvation thus accorded to you fill

^m Rom. viii. 1.

you with unutterable joy. I grant, your enemies are mighty, and your corruptions great, and your temptations manifold: but still I boldly adopt the appeal in my text, and ask, How shall you not escape, if you seek this salvation? Look at others, and see how they have escaped. See in those who crucified the Lord of glory, how speedy and effectual was the change wrought on them. See what has been already done for that multitude whom no man can number, and who are already enjoying that salvation around the throne of God. Soon shall ye be of that happy number. Only let the Gospel salvation be sought by you as the one thing needful, and you shall never feel the want of it in time or eternity. Give yourselves thoroughly to the attainment of it; and "your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."]

MMCCLXXIV.

CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO ANGELS.

Heb. ii. 6—8. *One in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.*

OUR blessed Lord has said, "Search the Scriptures; for they are they which testify of me." Hence it appears, that the Jews were highly privileged; because, if they would only look up to God for the illumination of their minds, they had within their reach an infallible directory in their way to heaven. But we are still more highly privileged, in that we have a multitude of passages pointed out to us by men, who were themselves inspired of God to discern and to explain the meaning of them. If we had been left to ourselves, we might have doubted whether our interpretations of the Scripture were just: but, when holy men of God are moved by the Holy Ghost, to open and apply those very words to Christ, which the prophets, under the influence of the same Spirit, spake of him, we proceed without any fear of error or delusion.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the types and prophecies of the Old Testament are more fully opened

to us, than in any other part of the apostolic writings. That epistle was evidently written on purpose to point out the connexion between the Jewish and Christian dispensations; to shew their perfect correspondence with each other, and the completion of Judaism in Christianity. It would be profitable to trace this through the whole epistle: but we must content ourselves with noticing only the passage before us.

Let us then consider,

I. The testimony here adduced—

The manner in which the Apostle speaks of this passage of Holy Writ is somewhat remarkable: at first it appears as if he himself did not recollect the author, or the part of Scripture where the passage occurred; but the fact is, that the Jews were so conversant with their Scriptures, as not to need any thing more than the mere citation of the words: the writer of them, and the place, were sufficiently known to all. What its import is, we can be at no loss to determine.

[David, contemplating the starry heavens, and the perfections of God as displayed in them, breaks out into a devout acknowledgment of the condescension of God, in noticing so poor and abject a creature as man; and his goodness in having subjected to man the whole animal creation^a. *This is the primary meaning* of the text: and, if we had not been instructed by God himself to look for any thing further, we should have rested in that as its full and only import. But we know on infallible authority, that there was a *prophetic meaning* in the psalm; and that it referred to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Having this clew given us, we find, that the mystical sense of the passage is, if we may so speak, by far the most literal. The words, in fact, are inexplicable, as referred to *man*, whether in his innocent or fallen state: for Adam was not reduced from a higher state in order to be made lower than the angels^b: nor is man, in his fallen state, “*a little lower than they, but a great deal lower*. Moreover, fallen man was not crowned with glory and honour;” nor are all the creatures in a state of subjection to him. The very words themselves therefore lead our thoughts to Christ,

^a Ps. viii. 3—8.

^b ἡλάττωσας conveys this idea.

in whom alone they ever received their accomplishment: and the manner in which the Apostle quotes them, shews, that the Jews themselves had interpreted them in that very sense in which he quoted them: for he is arguing with the Jews, to shew them the superiority of Christ to Moses, their great lawgiver, and to the angels, by whose ministration their law was given: and, if he had quoted passages from their writings which did not bear directly on his point, or had put a construction upon them which had not been generally received, they would have denied his interpretation of the passages he adduced: and consequently his whole argument would have immediately fallen to the ground.

If any thing further were wanted to shew that the testimony is here properly adduced, we might observe, that our blessed Lord himself quotes the very words before the text as applicable to himself, and *as being generally understood to refer to the Messiah^c.*]

Having ascertained the meaning of the testimony, let us consider,

II. The points established by it—

Some interpreters understand the text as quoted only in an *accommodated* sense: but the words themselves, and the scope of the Apostle's argument, prove that we must understand it as a prophecy that has been strictly and literally fulfilled. In this view it contains much respecting the Lord Jesus: It proves,

I. The dignity of his person—

[The scope of the Apostle's argument in the two first chapters of this epistle is, to shew that Christ is superior to the heavenly hosts, and "hath by inheritance a more excellent name than they." *Him* the Father acknowledges as his only-begotten Son^d: and commands all the angels to adore him^e. *Him* he addresses as the Creator and Governor of all things, the eternal, immutable Jehovah^f, to whom all adverse powers shall assuredly be subjected^g: to whom also the Christian dispensation ("of which St. Paul speaks," and which he designated as the "world to come,") is altogether committed, that he may order every thing relating to it according to his sovereign will and pleasure^h. As for angels, he has never spoken such things concerning *them*, or committed such power

^c Ps. ii. 2. with Matt. xxi. 15, 16.

^d Heb. i. 5.

^e Heb. i. 6.

^f Heb. i. 8—12.

^g Heb. i. 13.

^h Heb. ii. 5.

to *them*ⁱ. *They* are the fellow-servants of the saints^k, united with them as part of the Church over which Christ presides^l, and appointed to minister unto them in the capacity of servants^m. However venerable therefore they are in themselves, and whatever honour God put upon them in the giving of the law, they are infinitely below the Lord Jesus, who is their Creator, their Governor, and their God. In his human nature he was “made a little lower than they;” but in his pre-existent nature he was infinitely above them. O that we may have worthy conceptions of his Divine Majesty, and ever be ready to address him in the words of Thomas, “My Lord, and my God!”]

2. The truth of his Messiahship—

[Here is a prophecy that must receive an accomplishment: there must be a person superior to the angels in his own nature, and made lower than they by the assumption of our nature. He must submit to this humiliation “for the purpose of suffering death,” as the penalty due to the sins of men. Having “tasted death for every man,” he must be raised, and “crowned with glory and honour,” and must “have all things in heaven, earth, and hell, put under his feet.” Now then we ask, In whom has this, or any part of it, been fulfilled? Who has experienced either the humiliation or the exaltation which are here predicted? That Jesus has fulfilled the prophecy, we know: for, “being in the form of God, and accounting it no robbery to be equal with God, he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant: and having submitted to death, even the death of the cross, he has been exalted, and has had a name given him above every name, that every knee should bow to him, and every tongue confess him to be the Lord, to the glory of God the Fatherⁿ.” Is there any one else of whom these things, or any one of them, can be spoken? Assuredly not: “*But we see Jesus*” thus humbled, and thus exalted^o: and, consequently, Jesus is, beyond all doubt, “the Christ, the Saviour of the world.”]

3. The certainty of his triumphs—

[When he was on earth “he was crucified through weakness; but now he liveth by the power of God.” He is not only “crowned with glory and honour,” as his followers will be, but is “set far above all principality and power, and

ⁱ Heb. ii. 5.

^k Rev. xix. 10. and xxii. 9.

^l Eph. i. 10.

^m Heb. i. 14.

ⁿ Phil. ii. 6—11. where *ἐκένωσε* in ver. 7. corresponds with *ἡλάτρωσας* in the text.

^o ver. 9.

might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and being constituted Head over all things to the Church, he filleth all in all," supplying every member of it with light and life, even as the sun does in the material world^p. The Apostle indeed justly observes, "We see not yet all things put under him^q." But we see enough to assure us, that all things shall in due time be put under him. See to what a state he himself was reduced, when he lay sealed up, and guarded in the silent tomb! but he rose triumphant, and ascended up to heaven, and "sits as King upon God's holy hill of Zion." See how quickly he triumphed over all the lusts and prejudices of mankind, and subdued millions to the obedience of faith; and *this* through the instrumentality of a few poor fishermen! See how he carries on his victories yet daily through the world! Indeed every saint is a living witness for him, and a pledge to the world that nothing in the universe shall finally withstand his power.]

Surely this SUBJECT is full,

1. Of consolation to the godly—

[You are weak; and your enemies are mighty: but is this any ground for despondency. If an angel had been set at the head of the Church, you might well be afraid^r; but under the care of Jesus you have nothing to fear. Think with yourselves, is not the Lord Jesus possessed of "all power, both in heaven and earth?" Is there not "a fulness treasured up in him," on purpose that "you may receive out of it, even grace for grace?" Does not "all the fulness of the Godhead dwell in him bodily?" and has he not said, "My grace is sufficient for you?" Fear not, then; but "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Adopt the triumphant language which the prophet has put into your mouth; and "say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Fear not, I say; for "through His strength you shall be enabled to do all things," and "be more than conquerors through Him that loved you."]

2. Of terror to the ungodly—

[Because you behold not many signal interpositions of his power, you think that you may rebel against him with impunity. But see whether this prophecy has not been so far fulfilled already, as to give you reason to expect its full accomplishment! God has even "sworn that every knee

^p Eph. i. 20—23.

^q ver. 8.

^r See Exod. xxxii. 34. and xxxiii. 2, 3.

shall bow to Jesus^s:" and, if you will not submit to the sceptre of his grace, he will "break you in pieces with a rod of iron^t." Nor is it a mere nominal submission that will suffice: you must put yourselves willingly and unreservedly "*under his feet*," as conscious of your ill desert, and as ready to justify him, if he should "execute upon you the fierceness of his anger." You must be wholly and altogether his, in every member of your body, and in every faculty of your soul. O deceive not yourselves by a feigned or partial submission! — — — but "kiss the Son:" kiss him in token of the ardour of your affection, and of the delight you take in living to his glory. This is your true "wisdom, even though you be kings and judges of the earth^u." He is that "stone which the builders refused, and which is become the head of the corner:" if you build upon him, you will find him "a sure foundation;" but if you reject him, "he will fall upon you, and crush you to powder^x."]

^s Isai. xlv. 23. with Rom. xiv. 11.

^t Ps. ii. 9.

^u Ps. ii. 10—12.

^x Luke xx. 17, 18.

MMCCLXXV.

SUFFERINGS OF THE MESSIAH NECESSARY.

Heb. ii. 10. *It became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.*

THE Jews expected, that, at the coming of their Messiah, "all things should be subjected to him." But what kind of a dominion his should be, or how it should be obtained, they knew not. They pleased themselves with the idea of a *triumphing* Messiah; but quite overlooked what the prophets had foretold respecting the sufferings by which those triumphs should be accomplished. In a word, they neither knew how great he should be, nor to what a state of degradation he should be reduced. But St. Paul informed them, that, though he was, in his own nature, superior to angels, he should be brought into a condition inferior to them, for the purpose of expiating our guilt, and redeeming a ruined world. And this he declared to be such a dispensation as became the Most High God: "It became him, &c."

From these words I shall take occasion to shew,

I. The grand peculiarity of the Christian dispensation—

God had determined to bring an innumerable multitude of sons to glory—

[He had not dealt so with angels. Of them, not so much as one had been saved: but of men, it was God's purpose to restore many to the relation which they had forfeited as his "sons;" and to the inheritance of "glory," which they had lost — — —]

This he had ordained to accomplish through the intervention of his dear Son—

[Man could not effect it for himself; nor could all the angels in heaven have effected it. But Christ, being God equal with the Father, was appointed to be "the Captain of our salvation," and to obtain for us what could never be wrought by any other means — — —]

It was, however, to be effected solely "through the sufferings" of his Son—

[It was not by any exercise of his power that salvation was to be wrought; nor by instructing men how they might save themselves. He must become their Surety and Substitute, and must die in their place and stead — — — This is the grand peculiarity of the Gospel: and, if we view not the Gospel in this light, as a *redemption wrought by blood*, even by the blood of God's only dear Son, we have no just conception of it at all — — —]

Not content with a bare assertion, the Apostle states,

II. The special reason for this appointment—

God being the One Author and end of all, ("by whom, and for whom, are all things,") might be expected to accomplish this work by a mere arbitrary appointment of his own. But a very different line of conduct "became him." If he would save men at all, it was expedient that it should be through the sufferings of his Son. This, I say, "became him;"

1. For the honouring of his law—

[The law had been violated: and if its sanctions were not enforced, both it and the Lawgiver himself would be dishonoured. But *that* could not be: God would not suffer it:

and rather than such a stain should be brought on his moral government, he would exact of his only dear Son the debt that was due from us, and inflict on him the curse which our sins had merited. In this way the authority of his law would be fully vindicated, at the time that the transgressors of it were forgiven: yea, by the sufferings of our incarnate God it would be more honoured than if all its penalties had been inflicted on the whole human race. Seeing, then, that such honour would accrue to the law from this marvellous device, it “became” the Almighty Lawgiver to arrange his dispensations with a view to this great result.]

2. For the displaying of his own perfections—

[If man had been forgiven without any atonement made for sin, what should we have known either of the justice or the holiness of God? Holiness imports an hatred of sin; and justice, the dealing with men according to their deserts. But not a trace of these would have been found, if men had not suffered, either in their own persons or their Surety, the penalty due to sin. Even truth itself would have failed; and God’s most solemn threatenings been falsified. But no such consequences flow from the exercise of mercy through a suffering Saviour. On the contrary, every perfection of the Deity is the more honoured, because, what it derives not from us, it receives from the Lord Jesus Christ, who, as our Surety, endured all, that justice, or holiness, or truth could possibly require.]

3. For the magnifying of his own grace—

[Doubtless it would have been a stupendous act of grace, if man had been forgiven without any atonement made for sin. But, glorious as such a favour would have been, it would have had no glory, by reason of the infinitely richer display of mercy which we have in the Gospel of his Son. Such a mercy, if I may so speak, would have been attended with no sacrifice on the part of God: but by giving his own Son out of his bosom, he has made a sacrifice which no finite intelligence can ever duly appreciate. Hence *this* is represented as exhibiting, above all other things, “the exceeding riches of his grace;” and as commending to us, with unrivalled evidence, the wonders of his love: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and *gave his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*^a.” But to display this grace was worthy of the Deity; and though, with a view to it, the sacrifice that he must make was great, yet, on the whole, was it such a sacrifice as well “became him.”]

^a 1 John iv. 9, 10.

4. For the enabling of his Son to execute every part of his mediatorial office—

[There are parts of that office which he could not execute without suffering. As he could not atone for sin without suffering, so neither could he yield obedience to all that the law required of us without suffering. Patience and resignation can only be exercised under suffering: and therefore, “though he was a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered^b.” He must also sympathize with his afflicted people: and this also he would have been unable to do, if he had not been experimentally acquainted with sufferings in his own person: but “having suffered through temptations, he is now able to succour them that are tempted^c :” and we, knowing that “we have One who can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, are encouraged to come boldly to a throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in the time of need^d.”]

Let me now ASK, If such a dispensation “became God,” WHAT BECOMES US?

Does God seek to “bring us, as his sons, to glory?” Let us seek to obtain this great benefit—

[Can it be right that Almighty *God* should take such an interest in *us*, and *we* remain indifferent about *our own state*? Can we by any possibility be advanced to such honour as “sonship” with God, and such happiness as the possession of his “glory,” and shall we not exert ourselves to the utmost of our power? Shall any earthly distinctions stand for a moment in competition with these? — — —]

Has God appointed his own Son to be “the Captain of our salvation?” Let us seek salvation through Him alone—

[Through Christ alone it can ever be attained. He is the sole “Author” of it; and from him, as the purchase of his blood, and the effect of his grace, it must be received. Let us not, for a moment, cherish a thought of obtaining salvation from any other source: but let our reliance on him be simple and entire. Let “him be our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption.”]

Has God seen fit to “perfect his own Son through sufferings?” Let us be content to be perfected by him in the same way—

^b Heb. v. 8, 9. ^c Heb. ii. 17, 18. ^d Heb. iv. 15, 16.

[He has "predestinated his people to be conformed to the image of his Son^e:" and this conformity must be in holiness, in *sufferings*, and in glory. Our blessed Lord has told us, that we must "take up our cross daily, and follow him:" that "the servant cannot expect to be above his Lord:" and that "we must suffer with him, if ever we would reign with him^f." Let us be content, then, to fill up the measure of sufferings which he has allotted to us; and, if it must be so, "through much tribulation to enter into his kingdom." Let us be content, do I say? Rather, let us "rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for his sake," and account it an honour to be "partakers of his sufferings." The Israelites, under Joshua, did not gain possession of Canaan without encountering a foe: nor can *we*, under "the Captain of *our* salvation," become victors without a conflict. But let us "war a good warfare," and "endure unto the end." So shall we be not sons only, but heirs also, of our heavenly Father, and be made partakers of his glory for evermore.]

^e Rom. viii. 29.

^f Rom. viii. 17.

MMCCLXXVI.

THE ENDS OF CHRIST'S INCARNATION.

Heb. ii. 14, 15. *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage.*

IS it so indeed, that He who was the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person; that He who created and upholdeth all things by the word of his power; that He whom all the angels in heaven adore, became a man, and was made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted? Yes, "He, who was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, emptied himself of all his glory, and took upon him the form of a servant:" "the mighty God himself was a child born, and a Son given." And shall God be manifest in the flesh, and we not inquire into the reasons of such a stupendous mystery? Shall we profess to believe

this truth; and yet pay no more attention to it, than if it was a cunningly-devised fable? Let us inquire what occasion there was for it, and what ends God designed to accomplish by it. These are stated in the words before us. The children, whom he designed to redeem from death and hell, were in such a state, that nothing short of this would avail for their final happiness: they were subjected to death, and could be delivered from it only by one dying in their stead: they were in bondage to Satan, and could only be rescued from his dominion by one who should overcome this great adversary, in their nature, and in their behalf; in a word, by one who should both suffer what they merited, and gain the victories which they needed.

These are the ends of our Saviour's incarnation, as specified in the text.

I. The *more immediate* end was to suffer—

Suffer he must, even unto death, if he would effect the deliverance of his chosen people.

1. The necessities of his own people required it—

[They were reduced by sin to the lowest ebb of misery. Doomed to participate the lot of the fallen angels, they were as incapable as they of effecting their own deliverance. What then must be done? Must they be left to perish for ever? or shall an atonement be made for them? But who can offer an atonement that shall be of sufficient value to expiate their offences? The blood of bulls and of goats will not suffice: nor if the highest angel in heaven could offer himself, would that be adequate to the occasion; seeing that his merits, whatever they might be, could never extend to all the millions of our guilty race: the sacrifice, to answer that end, must be of infinite value: it must be offered by a person of infinite value: it must be offered by a person of infinite dignity: he must be God as well as man. He must be man, that he may suffer; he must be God, that his sufferings may be available for the desired end. Hence the necessity for our blessed Lord to become incarnate; and hence the necessity for him to die. Supposing him to come from heaven, and to teach us both by precept and example, that would not answer the necessities of man: Divine justice must be satisfied for the sins of men: the holiness of the Deity must be displayed in the punishment of sin: the truth of God, which denounced a curse against every transgression

of his law, must be kept inviolate: in a word, a sentence of death was gone forth against sinners; and it must be inflicted on them, or on a surety in their stead. Hence, if Jesus would ever bring us back to God, "he must suffer, the just in the place of us the unjust^a." If he would redeem our souls, he must "give his own life a ransom for us."]

2. His own covenant engagements required it—

[From all eternity did the Son of God engage to repair the evils which it was foreseen would in time be introduced by sin. A council of peace was held between the Father and the Son^b: the terms which were then agreed upon, are expressly mentioned by the Prophet Isaiah; "When thou shalt make thy soul an offering for sin, thou shalt see a seed, who shall prolong their days; and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in thy hand^c." These terms being acceded to on the Son's part, "a body was prepared him^d," and "he came in due season, made of a woman, and under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law^e." His incarnation alone would not have fulfilled his engagements: he must suffer: and hence, when his sufferings came upon him to the uttermost, and he felt, *as a man*, disposed to deprecate them, he especially called to his remembrance the engagements he had entered into, and submitted to drink the cup which was put into his hands: "Now is my soul troubled: and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name^f!"]

3. All the predictions concerning him required it—

[The very first promise clearly pointed it out: he, as "the seed of the woman, was to bruise the serpent's head:" but in the conflict "his own heel was to be bruised^g." To what an extent he was to suffer is fully declared: "his visage was to be so marred, more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: and so was he to sprinkle many nations^h." Standing in the place of us who deserved utter excision, he must suffer itⁱ. All the sacrifices of the Mosaic law shadowed forth this awful event. He was to be a priest; but what sacrifice could he offer? He was not of the tribe to which alone the offering of animal sacrifices belonged. He had no offering but his own body: which therefore he did present; and "with his own blood he entered within the vail, there to carry on and perfect the work he had begun on earth^k." Looking forward

^a 1 Pet. iii. 18.

^b Zech. vi. 13.

^c Isai. liii. 10.

^d Heb. x. 5.

^e Gal. iv. 4, 5.

^f John xii. 27, 28.

^g Gen. iii. 15.

^h Isai. lii. 13—15. See also liii. 4—12.

ⁱ Dan. ix. 26.

^k Heb. viii. 3, 4. and ix. 11, 12.

to his death, he often referred to it as that which should speedily be accomplished, *as the appointed means of saving a ruined world*¹. And, when his disciples were stumbled at his death, and regarded it as an event by which all their hopes and expectations were frustrated, he reproved them for their ignorance and unbelief, and shewed them, that it had been the great subject of prophecy from the beginning of the world; and that it was *necessary* to the accomplishment of the work he had undertaken^m — — —]

Such was the more immediate end of Christ's incarnation!

II. The *ultimate* end of it was to reign and triumph—

In overlooking the previous humiliation of their Messiah, the Jews greatly err: but in their expectation of a triumphing Messiah, they are right. He was indeed "to drink of the brook in the way;" but he was then "to lift up his head." His sufferings were to precede: but the whole Scripture attests, that a glory was to followⁿ: and by the very sufferings which he sustained, his triumphs were secured to him. He was to triumph,

1. In the destruction of Satan's empire—

[Satan, that "murderer," had introduced sin and death into the world: and by his continual agency he is carrying forward the work of death amongst the sinners of mankind; and exulting in the multitudes which are daily subjected to his tyrannic sway. But Jesus, we are assured, came to weaken and destroy his empire: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil^o."

But the point particularly to be noticed is, that Jesus was to accomplish this victory by means of his own death: "By death he was to destroy him that had the power of death." By reason of sin, all the human race were subjected to everlasting chains of darkness in the regions of despair. But Jesus, nailing to the cross the hand-writing that was against us, has cancelled it for ever. Satan thought, that, when he had so far prevailed as to secure the death of the Lord Jesus, he had gained his cause: but it was that very event which gave the death-blow to all Satan's power, in that it removed the only ground on which Satan could maintain his stand against the children of men. It was by that event that Jesus satisfied the demands

¹ 1 John xii. 31—33.

^m Luke xxiv. 21, 25—27, 44—46.

ⁿ 1 Pet. i. 11.

^o 1 John iii. 8.

of law and justice, and discharged the debt which had been contracted by mankind. And, that once discharged by our Surety, we can claim our release from all obligation to pay it ourselves. Hence we are told, that Jesus, whilst upon the cross, “spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them openly in it^p.” Yes, if Jesus had, as some have feigned, gone down himself to hell, and opened the prison-doors to those who were already there, he would not have more signally displayed his power, than he did in his death and resurrection, whereby he vanquished Satan and “led captivity itself captive.”]

2. In the deliverance of his own people—

[Death being inflicted as the penalty of sin, and being a prelude to an unknown state, all men by nature dread it. Though many, through pride and thoughtlessness, may brave it on a field of battle, no man can behold its gradual approaches without an awful apprehension of its terrors. But the Lord Jesus would not suffer that his people should remain in such bondage; and by his death he has effectually freed them from it. The sting of death is sin: but he by his death has cancelled sin, and blotted it out as a morning cloud. The offering which has satisfied the justice of the Deity, satisfies the sinner's conscience, and brings perfect peace into the soul. And it was one end of our Lord's death to effect this; that his people might be brought into perfect liberty, and enjoy a very heaven upon earth. To them death is now become a friend, for whose arrival to look forward with eager desire^q: it is numbered amongst their treasures also^r; and all fear, either of its present terrors, or future consequences, is removed. “The Son has made them free; and they are free indeed.”]

ADDRESS—

1. The captive sinner—

[How lamentable is it that the effects of Jesus' death should be so limited, as we see they really are! Though Satan is a vanquished enemy, there are but few who will “put their foot upon his neck.” Many are his willing captives still: and love the chains wherewith he binds them^s. O, beloved, what an awful thought is it, that to multitudes the incarnation and death of Christ are a curse, rather than a blessing! “Had he never come to die for them, they had not (comparatively) had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin:” and the state of Sodom and Gomorrha is less terrible than theirs. When will ye lay this to heart, O ye who “walk according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of

^p Col. ii. 14, 15.

^r 1 Cor. iii. 22.

^q 2 Pet. iii. 12.

^s 2 Tim. ii. 26.

the air, who worketh in all the children of disobedience?" Do but reflect on the account which you must hereafter give, and on the self-condemnation which you will feel in the day of judgment, when the full effects of your present disobedience will come upon you. I cannot contemplate your condition now, or your feelings in that day, without saying with the prophet, "O! that my head were waters, and mine eyes were a fountain of tears, that they might run down day and night in your behalf!" O let not all the wonders of redeeming love be in vain to you, yea, worse than in vain—a melancholy source of tenfold condemnation!]

2. The awakened penitent—

[Are you beginning to feel your sins a heavy burthen? Bless and adore your God for the provision he has made for you in the Son of his love. Your guilt is expiated by your Saviour's blood: and Satan, who has kept you hitherto in such cruel bondage, is dethroned. Look unto this Saviour. Did he come down from heaven? It was to seek and save the lost, yea, and the very chief of sinners. Lay hold on him; plead with God the sacrifice which he has offered; and seek an interest in the victories he has gained. It is for that he has lived; for you he has died; for you he reigns: and never is he better satisfied with the travail of his soul, than when he sees such as you born to God through him^t — — —]

3. The trembling believer—

[What would you that God should add to all that he has done for you? What is there wanting to dispel your fears, and encourage your hearts? Are you afraid of Satan? He is a vanquished enemy. Are you afraid of death? To you it is only as the gate of heaven. Be of good cheer. If you are weak, "your Redeemer is mighty;" and his "strength shall be perfected in your weakness." He, who for your sakes "partook of flesh and blood," with all the sinless infirmities of your nature, knows by experience all that you feel, and will afford you all needful succour. Fear not; "He will not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax, but will bring forth judgment unto victory." Rejoice then in him; rejoice evermore: and doubt not but that "he who has begun a good work in you, will for his own sake perfect it to the end."]

^t Isai. liii. 11.

MMCCCLXXVII.

CHRIST'S POWER TO SUCCOUR THE TEMPTED.

Heb. ii. 18. *In that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.*

THERE was in various respects a necessity for Christ's humiliation : on our part, that, an atonement being offered for us, we might find favour with God : on God's part, that his justice might be satisfied, and his law be magnified : and on the part of Christ himself, that he might be qualified for the discharge of his mediatorial office. This, having been expressly asserted in the preceding verse, is further intimated in the words we have just read ; which lead us to consider,

I. The temptations of our Lord—

Great and manifold were the trials which our blessed Lord sustained,

1. From men—

[Though in his infancy he grew up in favour with men as well as with God, yet from his first entrance on his public ministry, he was an object of universal contempt and abhorrence^a. He endured all manner of contradiction from all ranks and orders of men : they cavilled at his words, misrepresented his actions, reviled him as an impostor, and a confederate with the devil, and, at last, apprehended, condemned, and crucified him.]

2. From devils—

[These assaulted him with fiery temptations in the wilderness, urging him to distrust, presumption, and idolatry. They attacked him with fresh vigour in the garden, when the powers of darkness combined all their force against him : and they made their last efforts against him on the cross ; when, though “ triumphed over and spoiled by him,” they succeeded in “ bruising his heel,” and in bringing him down to the chambers of death.]

3. From God—

[When he stood as the surety of sinners, God exacted of him the utmost farthing of our debt. It was the Father who

^a Isai. xlix. 7.

put the bitter cup into his hands, who laid the tremendous load of our iniquities upon him, and “bruised him,” that the fragrance of his offering might ascend up as incense with acceptance before him^b.]

But, notwithstanding these sufferings of his, our text assures us of,

II. His ability to succour his tempted people—

All his people, like him, are persecuted by men, assailed by devils, and chastised by God. But Jesus is able to succour them: he has a sufficiency,

1. Of power and strength—

[He has all power committed to him, yea, all fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him. He can bind the strong man armed, and rescue from him his wretched captives. There is nothing impossible with him; and the weaker his people are, the more shall “his strength be perfected in their weakness.”]

2. Of wisdom—

[As he has “power to deliver the godly out of temptations,” so can he defeat all the plots of their adversaries, and take even Satan himself in his own devices. He sees every weapon that is formed against them, and knows the day and hour that their enemies set themselves against them^c. He discerns also the best time and manner in which to afford his aid, and so to proportion it to our necessities, as both to secure us the victory, and himself the glory.]

3. Of pity and compassion—

[He wept on account of the afflictions of his friends when he was on earth: nor will he forget to pity us, now that he is in heaven. “The very apple of his eye is wounded, whenever any of his dear people are touched.” “In all their afflictions, he is afflicted; and as, in his love and in his pity he redeemed them, and bare them, and carried them all the days of old,” so does he now, being “touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” and sympathizing with us in all our troubles^d.]

Having noticed his temptations, and his ability to succour us under ours, it will be proper to shew,

III. The connexion between the two, or the dependence of the one upon the other—

As God, he of necessity possessed every perfection:

^b Compare Isai. liii. 10. with Exod. xxx. 36.

^c Jer. xlix. 30.

^d Isai. lxiii. 9.

but, as man and mediator, he learned much from his own experience. By his own temptations,

1. He learned *our need of succour*—

[He himself, under his own grievous sufferings, “prayed to God with strong crying and tears, and was heard,” and strengthened from above^e. Hence then he knows how much *we* must need assistance under our trials, and how certainly we must faint, if we be not supported by his almighty power.]

2. He acquired *a right to succour us*—

[We are bought by him with the inestimable price of his own blood. And it was agreed with him in the covenant of redemption, that, “if he would make his soul an offering for sin, he should see a seed; and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands^f.” Having then paid the price, he has a right to us as “his purchased possession;” and has therefore a right to convey to us whatever may be needful for the salvation of our souls.]

3. He attained *a disposition to succour us*—

[We are assured that “he learned obedience by the things that he suffered^g.” Now, as obedience consists entirely in love to God and man, sympathy, which is the highest office of love, must of necessity have been learned by him, together with every other part of his duty. And how perfectly he had learned it, his address to the persecuting Saul declares; “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *me*?” And it is worthy of observation, that the Apostle ascribes his sympathy to this very cause; “his having been tempted in all things like unto us, qualifying and disposing him to feel for us under our infirmities^h.” Nay, further, he observes, that there was a necessity for him to be made like unto us in all things, *in order that he might be* a merciful and faithful High-priest in things pertaining to God; which office he could not have executed if he had not, by his own sufferings, been enabled to sympathize with usⁱ.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are conflicting with temptations—

[The Lord’s people still are assaulted with manifold temptations. Satan is not idle: he still “desires to sift us as wheat,” and still “as a roaring lion goeth about, seeking whom he may devour.” There is not a saint whom he does not labour to “corrupt from the simplicity that is in Christ:” and

^e Heb. v. 7. with Luke xxii. 42, 43.

^f Isai. liii. 10.

^g Heb. v. 8.

^h Heb. iv. 15.

ⁱ Heb. ii. 17.

for this end he still on many occasions “ transforms himself into an angel of light.” But however severe your outward or inward trials may be, you have the comfort to reflect, that Christ endured the same before you, and is able to afford you effectual succour. Think not then your difficulties peculiar, or insurmountable; but assure yourselves of his sympathy and care; and be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”]

2. Those who are yielding to their temptations—

[Excuse not your compliances by pleading the frailty of your nature; for “ Christ is able to make all grace abound towards you, that you having always all sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work^k.” Continue not then under unmortified tempers, or criminal neglects; but call on the Lord, who “ will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will, with the temptation, make also a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it^l.” I say again, plead not in excuse the corruption of your nature, or the difficulties of your situation: for *grace which is not effectual, is no grace*. The very weakest amongst you may say, “ I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me,” and, though assaulted by all the powers of darkness, shall be “ more than conqueror through him that loved me.”]

^k 2 Cor. ix. 8.

^l 1 Cor. x. 13.

MMCLXXVIII.

NAMES AND OFFICES OF CHRIST.

Heb. iii. 1. *Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.*

OUR Lord possessed, from all eternity, a nature infinitely superior to that of angels^a: yet did he submit to the lowest humiliation for us^b. And it is by the knowledge of him, as humbled, that we attain salvation^c.

The Apostle having spoken much on this subject in the foregoing chapter, enforces it with this affectionate exhortation—

I. Explain the exhortation—

^a Heb. i. 3, 8, 10.

^b Phil. ii. 6, 7.

^c John xvii. 8.

The first thing that calls for our attention is *the description which he gives of all true Christians*—

[Wishing to persuade, he strove by tenderness to conciliate their esteem: he calls them brethren; which they are, both by relation^d and affection^e. They are “holy;” set apart for the service and enjoyment of God—washed in the fountain of Christ’s blood, and renewed after the Divine image: they are “partakers of an heavenly calling;” called to heavenly exercises and enjoyments—obedient to that call—and suitably influenced by it in their hearts and lives. How amiable is such a character! “brethren!” “holy!” “called!” &c. Who would not wish to be found of their number?]

The next thing which demands our notice is *the object he sets before them*—

[When he speaks of Christ in common, he places the name “Jesus” first; but when with more than ordinary solemnity, the name “Christ” is first. He here describes the Saviour both by his *names* and *offices*. His names “Christ^f, Jesus^g,” are peculiarly significant in this connexion: his offices are such as Moses and Aaron sustained under the law. Christ is “the Apostle of our profession,” as being *sent*, like Moses, to publish that religion which we profess: he is also “the High-priest of it,” because, like Aaron, he performs all that is necessary for our reconciliation with God^h.]

The last thing to explain is *the duty which he presses upon them*—

The word which we translate “consider,” implies an attentive regardⁱ. It might easily be shewn how important this duty is; but our observations on this subject will occur more properly in another place.]

^d Matt. xxiii. 9.

^e 1 John iii. 14.

^f It is of the same import as *Messias*, John i. 44. and means *Anointed*.

^g *Jesus* is the same with *Joshua*, Heb. iv. 8.; and *Joshua* is a contraction for *Jah Oseah*, the former of which signifies *God*, and the latter *Saviour*. This name was given by *God* to *Hoseah* the son of *Nun*, who, as a type of *Christ*, led the *Israelites* into the land of *Canaan*: and the giving of this name to the *Virgin’s Son* may be justly considered as an accomplishment of that prophecy which said he should be called *Emmanuel*, *God with us*. Its import therefore is, *Divine Saviour*. See Matt. i. 21—23. and Bp. Pearson, p. 69, 70.

^h *Jesus*, as our High-priest, offered himself a sacrifice for us—is gone into the holy of holies to present his blood before the mercy-seat—liveth to make intercession for us—presents our offerings unto the Father—bears us on his breast-plate—and makes known to us the will of *God*.

ⁱ Κατανοήσατε.

Having spoken what was necessary to unfold the meaning of the exhortation, we proceed to,

II. Enforce it—

To those who answer the foregoing character we address the exhortation—

1. Consider the object set before you—

His names—

[As “Jesus,” Divine Saviour, he is able to save to the uttermost: As “Christ,” he was anointed of God for this very purpose. Had he not been appointed of God, or had he been less than God, you might have been afraid to trust in him; but his names attest his right and ability to save. Think how these words would sound in hell; and let them be as sweet to you as they would be to the unhappy spirits there.]

His offices—

[As the Apostle or Prophet of the Church, he will instruct all^k — — — As the High-priest, he will open a way for us into the holy place¹ — — — O reflect on these, till your hearts burn within you with gratitude and love !]

2. Consider more particularly the view given of him in the preceding and following context—

His compassion as an High-priest—

[He himself has endured persecution from men, temptation from Satan, desertion from God, &c.^m: he will sympathize with you under your trialsⁿ. Let this be a source of comfort to you under every affliction.]

His faithfulness as a Prophet—

[He extends his care to all his people^o: he never suffered the weakest believer to err finally^p; nor will he fail to guide us aright^q. Go to him then for teaching in every doubt and every difficulty.]

Those who do not answer to the character may reap benefit from the EXHORTATION—

[Ye who are unholy, and strangers to the heavenly calling, consider this description of our blessed Lord. Consider it—with attention, that you may understand it—with faith, that you may have an interest in it—with affection, that you may

^k Matt. xi. 29. ¹ Heb. x. 19, 20. ^m Heb. ii. 17, 18.

ⁿ Heb. iv. 15. This may be further illustrated by the care of a refiner, whom Christ is said to resemble, Mal. iii. 3.

^o Heb. iii. 2.

^p Isai. xxxv. 8.

^q Isai. xxx. 21. Ps. lxxiii. 24.

delight in it—with gratitude, that you may display its influence in your heart^r.]

^r This subject may be reduced to more of unity and simplicity, thus :—Mark,

I. What offices the Lord Jesus Christ sustains for us—

Every religion has its apostles, who propagate it, and its priests, who perform its rites. Of our religion our incarnate God, the Lord Jesus Christ, is both the Apostle and High-priest. These offices were assigned to him from eternity, Ps. xl. 6—8. He executed them faithfully when on earth; the prophetic, Heb. i. 2. and ii. 3; the priestly, Heb. i. 3. and ii. 14, 17. He still discharges them for the good of his people; as a prophet, teaching them by his Spirit, John xvi. 7—11; as a priest, compassionating and relieving all their spiritual necessities, Heb. ii. 18. and iv. 15.

II. Our duty towards Him in relation to them—

We should consider him in these characters: with attention, that we may have the fullest knowledge of him; with faith, that we derive all benefit from them; with gratitude, that we may give him the glory of them.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who profess to be “partakers of the heavenly calling”—

If indeed you have experienced the power of divine grace, you will need no incentives to this duty. To contemplate the Lord Jesus Christ in all his excellency and glory, will be the richest delight of your souls.

2. To those who are strangers to this holy exercise—

Alas! what do you lose! There is no other subject under heaven that would so repay your labour. The more you delight yourselves in Christ, the more evidence you will have of his grace in your souls, and the better preparation for his glory.

MMCLXXIX.

CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO MOSES.

Heb. iii. 5, 6. *Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.*

IN order to have a just conception of the Christian dispensation, we must above all things acquire scriptural views of the person of Christ, as God and man, and of his mediatorial character, as Emmanuel,

God with us. It is in this latter view more especially, that we are led to contemplate him throughout this whole epistle. As God, he is "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person;" whilst, as man, "he has purged our sins, and is set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high^a:" but it is as God and man in one Christ that his sacrifice becomes effectual for this great end. It is in his mediatorial capacity, as God-man, that he is exalted above all the angels in heaven, who are expressly enjoined to "worship him^b." And it is in the same capacity that we are now called upon to "consider him as the Apostle and High-priest of our profession^c." As "the Apostle" of our profession, *sent* like Moses, to instruct us in the mind and will of God, he is superior to Moses, whose instructions he is sent to supersede. And, in like manner, will his superiority to Aaron also be declared, when we shall come, in a subsequent part of this epistle, to consider his priesthood. It is the comparison between him and Moses which alone we have to notice at this time.

We proceed then to mark,

I. The superiority of Christ to Moses—

The character given of Moses is most exalted—

[He was "faithful in all God's house^a." From the first moment of his undertaking the office that was assigned him, he was faithful in the discharge of it. Whatever was commanded him to do, he did; adding nothing, omitting nothing, neglecting nothing. Whether the commands were moral or ceremonial, he was observant of every the minutest direction that was given him. He was aware that all which he was commissioned to say or do, had respect to a future period, and was intended to shadow forth something under a future dispensation: and so accurate was he in every particular, that there is not the smallest want of agreement between the Jewish and Christian codes, the one answering to the other, as the coin to the die by which it is stamped. As the tabernacle, even to the smallest pin, was "made according to the pattern shew to him in the mount;" so was that whole dispensation in perfect accordance with that under which we live.

^a Heb. i. 3. ^b Heb. i. 4—6. ^c ver. 1. ^d Numb. xii. 7.

Much he had to try him, and to shake his fidelity: but he was immovable. Nothing could for a moment divert him from his duty, or cause him to relax his efforts in his Master's cause. And in this fidelity he stood alone. Aaron and Miriam both turned aside from the path of duty; yea, both confederated even against Moses himself. But Moses was steadfast to the end, unmoved, unwearied, unrestrained.]

But Christ in this respect was exalted infinitely above him—

[Christ also was faithful in all his house. He delivered nothing which he had not previously heard and learned of his Father: but all which had been given him either to do or teach, he did and taught with all imaginable fidelity: yea, and what he was ordained to suffer also for the sins of men, he patiently endured, drinking the bitter cup even to the dregs, and never stopping till he could say, in relation to it all, "Tis finished."

Thus far the two may be supposed to have been upon an equality. But there are some points of difference between them, which exalt the office and character of Christ far above that of Moses. Moses was "a servant *in* the house of another:" Christ was a Son, or Lord, "*over* his own house." Moses only instructed his house: but Christ was the very source and builder of the house he governed; every member of it having been created by his power, and redeemed by his blood, and converted by his grace. The house itself would have had no existence but for him. Now, as the builder of a house, whether in a literal, political, or religious sense, must be far above the work which he has prepared; so must Christ, who formed his house, be far above every member of it: and as being the only true source of every thing in the Church, he must be truly and properly "God^e;" and consequently have infinitely higher glory than Moses, who was only a member of the very house which he himself was appointed to instruct and govern.]

That this superiority of his is not a mere speculative point, will appear, if we consider,

II. Our interest in it—

"We are his house"—

[The Church is called in Scripture "the house of God^f:" and if we have truly believed in Christ, we are that house. We are those for whom all the wonders of redeeming love were planned; those for whom all that Christ has ever executed was undertaken; those for whose sake he has hitherto

^e ver. 4.

^f 1 Tim. iii. 15.

ordered all things both in heaven and earth; those over whom he still watches as his peculiar care; and those for whom he is engaged to complete the work he has begun. Wonderful thought! We are his house, his family, his peculiar people! What an honour! what a privilege! what a blessing!

But it is here taken for granted, that we have believed in him, and made him the one foundation of all our hopes, and boldly confessed him in the presence of an ungodly world:]

And under this character we have appropriate duties and obligations—

[We must “hold fast our confidence, and the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end.” We shall have difficulties to encounter, even as Moses and Christ had: but we must endure like them, being “steadfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Whatever we may meet with, we must not for a moment be moved away from the hope of the Gospel: we must stand fast in our principles^g — — — our practice^h — — — our professionⁱ — — — for on our steadfastness in these things our ultimate acceptance with him depends. “If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: but if we deny him, he will deny us. And if we believe not (either the one or other of these sayings), yet he abideth faithful (to his word); he cannot deny himself^k,” He will be with us, whilst we are with him: if we seek him, he will be found of us: but if we forsake him, he will forsake us^l.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let us put ourselves under his direction—

[Christ is the great Head and Lord of all. From him we must receive directions, as he did from his Father, and as Moses did also. Nothing is to be done by us but according to his word; nothing to be done which he has forbidden; nothing to be omitted which he has commanded: no deviation is to be admitted in a way of excess or defect. If doubt at any time arise respecting the path of duty, we must consult him, and not proceed, till we have attained, so far as we can attain, the knowledge of his will. Human opinions are to have no weight with us in opposition to his word. And if we see not as yet the reasons of his commands, as Moses certainly did not in relation to the ceremonial law, we are not on that account to disobey them, but in all humility to comply with them, saying, “What I know not now, I shall know hereafter^m.” Nor are we to complain of any commandment as difficult or self-denying; but to disregard even life itself, if by the sacrifice of it He may

^g Eph. iv. 14.

^h Heb. x. 26.

ⁱ Heb. x. 23.

^k 2 Tim. ii. 12.

^l 2 Chron. xv. 2.

^m John xiii. 6, 7.

be glorifiedⁿ. Admirable was the lesson which the Jews were taught in the wilderness: if the pillar and the cloud moved for several days and nights together, they continued to follow it: and if it was stationary for a year together, they were stationary also. Thus it should be with us: we should move *when*, and *where*, and *as* the Lord prescribes, and in that way alone, to the latest hour of our lives.]

2. Let us endeavour to approve ourselves to him in our respective spheres—

[He walked amongst the seven golden candlesticks, the seven Churches of Asia, and declared to each of them, “I know thy works.” And still are his eyes as a flame of fire to penetrate the inmost recesses of our hearts. We must not therefore be satisfied with walking irreproachably before men, but must labour to approve ourselves to Him who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins. We must be attentive not to our actions only, but to our motives and principles, that, if possible, every thought may be brought into captivity to his will. We must seek to obtain from God that testimony which he bore to Moses, that we are “faithful in all our house.” Let us look to it, that as parents and children, masters and servants, rulers and subjects, we do all that he has required of us. Let us labour to “serve him with a perfect heart;” so that in all our commerce with men, and in our secret walk with God, we may have “the witness of his Spirit that we please him^o;” and may receive from him in the last day that testimony of his approbation, “Well done, good and *faithful* servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord.”]

3. Let us expect from him all that he has undertaken for us—

[Still does he superintend the concerns of his Church: and though he has wrought much for us, yet is there much that yet remains to be done, and much that he has promised to be accomplished. But “his promises are sure to all his seed^p”: not one of them shall ever fail: nor shall even the least member of his house ever have occasion to complain that he was disappointed of his hope. Joshua’s testimony shall be that of all the Church in the last day, that “of all which God has promised, not one thing has failed^q.” Take hold then of his promises, and plead them before him. If they appear too great to be fulfilled, “stagger not at them, but hope against hope, and be strong in faith, giving glory to God^r.” If your

ⁿ Phil. i. 20.

^o Heb. xi. 5.

^p Rom. iv. 16.

^q Josh. xxiii. 14.

^r Rom. iv. 18, 20.

tribulations be great, let them not for a moment obstruct your rejoicing in him; but “maintain your glorying firm unto the end.” See the utmost desires of a bleeding soul all concentrated in one short prayer; and, for the accomplishment of them, rest not merely on the love and power of Jesus, but on his fidelity: and when you have been praying that the very God of peace would sanctify you wholly, and that your whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, then add, “Faithful is He that hath called me, who also will do it^s.”]

^s 1 Thess. v. 23, 24.

MMCCLXXX.

AGAINST DEPARTING FROM GOD.

Heb. iii. 12—14. *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.*

THE consideration of the fulness and sufficiency of Christ, is that which animates the believer in all his conflicts: yet it is on no account to supersede our own care and watchfulness: on the contrary, it affords us the greatest encouragement to watch, because it ensures success to us in our endeavours, which, without his Almighty aid, would be of no avail. In this view it is that the inspired writer calls us to “consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, who was not merely a servant, like Moses, but a son, the Heir and Lord of all, yea, the very builder of that spiritual house, of which we profess ourselves to be a part.” On this truth he grounds the exhortation in the text^a, in which he suggests,

I. A solemn caution—

Difficult as it is to come to God, we find it but too

^a All the words between “wherefore,” in ver. 7, and the text, are a parenthesis: we must therefore connect the text thus; “Wherefore,” “take heed,” &c.

easy to depart from him. We should therefore be on our guard,

1. Against any departure from him—

[While men are yielding to temptation, and turning aside from the ways of God, they cherish a hope that they may still preserve their interest in his favour, though they be not studious to do his will. But a departure of any kind, whether from the faith or practice of Christianity, is nothing less than a departure from God himself, even from him who is the only source of life and happiness. We cannot therefore be too much on our guard against any secret declensions, which are so dishonourable to him whom we profess to love, and so destructive of our present and eternal welfare.]

2. Against that unbelief from whence all declensions arise—

[As faith is that which brings us to God, and keeps us steadfast in our adherence to him, so unbelief separates us from him, and, in proportion as it is harboured, invariably alienates us from the life of God. Whatever be the more immediate object of that unbelief, whether we attempt to lower the strictness of God's precepts, or question the veracity of his promises or threatenings, it proceeds equally from "an evil heart," and brings with it the same pernicious consequences: it is a root of bitterness, which, if it be permitted to spring up, will cause every devout affection to wither and decay. We must therefore labour to eradicate it, if we would not eat for ever its bitter fruits.]

That his caution may have its due effect, the Apostle prescribes,

II. The means of improving it—

Sin is of a deceitful and hardening nature—

[When "a backslider in heart" commits a sin, many thoughts will arise in his mind to palliate the evil, and to make him think that it will not be attended with any important consequences. Soon he begins to doubt whether the thing be evil at all; and, ere long, to justify it from the peculiarity of his circumstances. At first he felt some remorse; but presently his conscience becomes less tender, till at last it is altogether seared and callous; so that, notwithstanding he be miserably departed from God, he is regardless of his loss, and insensible of his danger. Who that has ever noticed the workings of his own heart, has not found what a bewitching and besotting thing sin is? yea, who has not often seen reason to bewail its deceitful, hardening effects?]

To guard effectually against it we should watch over each other—

[Sin, from the foregoing qualities, naturally hides itself from our view, and renders us inattentive to the means of prevention. But ignorant as we often are of our own spirit, we see clearly enough the defects of others; yea, perhaps we condemn with severity in others the very things which we allow in ourselves. To watch over each other therefore, and to warn each other of those declensions which we either see or apprehend, is a most valuable service; and, if performed with discretion and love, it can scarcely fail of producing the happiest effects. This is a duty to which God has solemnly called us in his word^b; and it is to be a part of our “daily” work. Our time for it will be very short: either we or our brother may be speedily removed; and our opportunity of benefiting his soul may be lost for ever. We should exhort one another therefore “daily, while it is called To-day;” and, though it is often an unpleasant office, we should use all fidelity in the execution of it. By this means we may restore a brother before he has relapsed too far, and preserve him from that departure from God, which would otherwise terminate in his destruction.]

Still further to enforce the caution given us, the Apostle adds,

III. A motive to regard it—

Our final participation of Christ’s benefits depends on our steadfastness in the pursuit of them—

[Without entering into the question, whether God have decreed the final perseverance of the saints, we may be fully assured, that none can attain salvation but by persevering in the way of holiness to the end of life: the Scriptures continually speak this language, “He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved:” “but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him^c.” It is true that believers are already *in a measure* “partakers of Christ:” but the complete enjoyment of his benefits is reserved for the future life: and we must not only have a scriptural and well-founded confidence at first, but must keep it steadfast even to the end, in order to attain that full possession of our inheritance. You may call yourselves “brethren,” and may boast of “your confidence in Christ:” but it is to *you*, yea, to *all* of you, that the caution is addressed; and to *you* I address myself, saying, “Take heed lest there be in *any* of you an evil heart of

^b Lev. xix. 17.

^c Matt. xxiv. 13. Heb. x. 38.

unbelief," and "lest *any* of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."]

If any thing can stimulate us to caution, surely this must—

[Eternity is at stake, and depends on our present conduct: according as we approve ourselves to the heart-searching God, will our state be fixed for ever. Is it not madness to be remiss and careless under such circumstances? Would any one, who should have reason to think his house were on fire, sit still without endeavouring to find out the latent grounds of his alarm? And shall we know our proneness to unbelief, and not guard against its operation, lest it prevail against us, and lead us to apostasy? Shall we acknowledge the deceitful, hardening nature of sin, and not exhort each other to mortify and subdue it? Surely, if we have the smallest concern for our own souls and the souls of others, we shall not only regard the caution given us in the text, but shall labour to improve it in the way prescribed.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have never come to God at all—

[The foregoing subject is *in itself* applicable to those only who profess religion; but it may be accommodated to those also who make no such profession: for, if they who have come to God are in danger of departing from him, and they who have enjoyed a scriptural confidence, may lose it; if they, who have believed, may "make shipwreck of their faith," and they, who have "begun in the Spirit, may end in the flesh;" if they, who have "begun to run well, may be hindered," and they who have "escaped the pollutions of the world, may again be entangled therein and overcome;" and, lastly, if they who "have been enlightened, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, may so fall away as never to be renewed unto repentance;" what must become of those who have never experienced any of these things? Can they be safe? Can they have any scriptural hope of heaven? If the strongest have so much need of caution, and the most circumspect such reason to fear the deceitful, hardening effects of sin, surely the careless have need to tremble, lest they "die in their sins," and "be driven away in their wickedness." If all, except two, of those who came out of Egypt, perished in the wilderness, can they hope to enter into the heavenly Canaan, who have never once come forth from their spiritual bondage? The point is clear; may God enable us to lay it to heart, and to consider it with the attention it deserves!]

2. Those who are conflicting with their spiritual enemies—

[Much has already been spoken to you both in a way of caution and direction: we beg leave to add a word of encouragement. The thing against which you are chiefly guarded, is unbelief; because *that* is the true source of all apostasy. We now would say, Be strong in faith, giving glory to God. "Faith is the shield wherewith you are to quench the fiery darts" of your enemies. Only believe; and Omnipotence will come to your support. Only believe; and you shall experience "the mighty working of *his* power, who raised Christ from the dead." Commit yourself to him "who is able to keep you from falling; and he will present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."]

MMCLXXXI.

CANAAN TYPICAL OF THE BELIEVER'S SPIRITUAL AND ETERNAL REST.

Heb. iv. 1. *Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.*

THE histories of the Old Testament are very instructive to us. The divine interpositions, as well in a way of judgment as of mercy, shew *us* what to expect from God^a. The Apostle has been recording the destruction of the Jews in the wilderness^b: and from thence he takes occasion to urge us to holy fear and diligence—

Consider,

I. What is that rest which God has promised us—

The rest promised to the Israelites was the land of Canaan: but the Israelites had already for many hundred years possessed that land. The rest therefore, which David speaks of as yet future, must be a rest, of which Canaan was only a type or shadow—

It includes,

1. A *present* rest in Christ—

^a 1 Cor. x. 11.

^b Heb. iii.

[A soul ignorant of Christ, can have no rest; but “by believing in Christ it has peace with God:” this is that rest which our Saviour promises to troubled souls^c.]

2. A *future* rest in heaven—

[The rest of the soul is never perfect in this life: tribulations are the way through which we are all to pass; but in heaven our happiness will be complete: that therefore must be the rest in which our labours shall terminate^d.]

Of this rest God has left us a promise in his word—

[It is called *his*, because he has prepared it for us from the beginning: it is his also, inasmuch as it is the gift of his sovereign grace: it is his moreover, as enjoyed in and with him; nor has he only revealed it as an object worthy our pursuit, but promised it to every penitent and believing sinner^e.]

It becomes us then to inquire,

II. What effect the promise of this rest should have upon us?

The news of any great and unexpected acquisition immediately produces strong emotions in our minds. The prospect therefore of present and eternal rest should surely excite much solicitude respecting it—

[We should endeavour to ascertain our title to it: we should fear lest by any means we be deprived of it; nor should we account any thing too much to do in order to obtain it: our vigilance and zeal should be proportioned to its value.]

The danger of coming short of it should increase our diligence in the pursuit of it—

[Of six hundred thousand that came out of Egypt, only two entered into Canaan: the others “could not enter in by reason of their unbelief.” And how much unbelief is there in *our* hearts! Yet, if we live under its power, we in vain hope for this rest: nor will the numbers of those, who are so circumstanced, afford security to us, any more than it did to those who perished in the wilderness. Surely then we should “fear lest we perish after their example.”]

The misery of coming short of it should also stimulate our exertions—

[There is no intermediate state between heaven and hell; nor will there be any other state of probation afforded us. They who rest not in Christ, can never know solid peace in

^c Matt. xi. 28.

^d Rev. xiv. 13.

^e Acts ii. 39.

this world; nor will they experience any thing but tribulation to all eternity^f: there will be an impassable gulf between them and heaven. What fear and caution should this thought excite !]

We should fear lest we even “seem” to come short of it—

[To be in suspense about our eternal state is dreadful: God’s honour, as well as our happiness, is affected by it. We should seek to be “always triumphing in Christ,” and at last to have “an abundant entrance into his kingdom.”]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who have no fears about their souls—

[Your rest, such as it is, is by no means to be desired: it will soon vanish in the prospect of death and judgment, and it will speedily terminate in everlasting woe. Seek then the true rest, while yet it may be found: seek it in Christ, who alone can impart it to you; nor doubt but that it will abundantly recompense your labours.]

2. To those who are filled with slavish fears—

[These are not fears which you ought to entertain: they are calculated to rob you of the heavenly rest, rather than to bring you into it. The fear you should cultivate, is a jealous and watchful fear: to live under the influence of this, is to be truly blessed^g: this well consists with even a present rest in the Lord Jesus. Lay hold then on the promise which is left you in the Gospel, and expect that “He who has promised will also perform:” they “who trust in the Lord, shall never be confounded.”]

3. To those who maintain a godly fear and jealousy—

[Disputes about the doctrine of perseverance are unprofitable and vain; but to unite a jealousy over ourselves with a confidence in God, will guard us against mistakes on either hand. Go on then in this good way, in which there is no danger of error or excess: thus will your soul be kept at an equal distance from presumption and despondency, and the attainment of your rest be perfectly secured.]

^f 2 Thess. i. 8, 9. Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

^g Prov. xxviii. 14.

MMCLXXXII.

THE REASON WHY MEN ARE SO LITTLE PROFITED BY
THE GOSPEL.

Heb. iv. 2. *Unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.*

IN these words there is a peculiarity of expression, which, till it is explained, seems almost unaccountable. Had the Apostle said that the Gospel was preached unto the Jews, as well as unto us, it would have been intelligible enough: but the text, as it stands, seems to give the preference to *them*, as if *they* had enjoyed a pre-eminent display of God's favour, and a clearer revelation of his will than ourselves. But the true meaning of the Apostle will appear from a due attention to the context. The Apostle is shewing the superiority of Christ to Moses, Moses being a servant only in God's house, but Christ being a Son and Lord over his own house. "That house are we," says he, "if we hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of our hope, firm unto the end^a." To impress this idea the more strongly on our minds, he, in the language of David, urges us to guard against a departure from God, lest, like the Israelites of old, we provoke God to cut us off from his promised rest. But, regarding the very passage which he quotes as needing some explanation, since, though all the adults who came out of Egypt perished in the wilderness, their children did enjoy the promised rest, he intimates, that the very expression of David shewed that Canaan was only a shadow of the rest promised to Israel, and that the true rest was common to all the children of Abraham, whether Jews or Gentiles. Of *this* rest he exhorts us not to come short: for that the promise *relating to it* belonged to *us* as much as to the Jews in the time of Moses: and, as *they* came short of it in consequence

^a Heb. iii. 6.

of their unbelief, so shall *we*, if we mix not faith with the truths we hear.

Now this view of the Apostle's words limits the term "Gospel" to that which alone is mentioned in the context, the promised *rest*. Hence, to compare the Gospel, as revealed to the Jews by Moses and the Prophets, with that which is revealed to us by Christ and his Apostles *in a general view*, would be beside the proper scope of our text. It would be profitable indeed to see how the moral law shuts us up to Christ, and how the ceremonial law shadows forth his work and offices; and how the Prophets also declare the fulness and excellency of his salvation; or, in the words of the Apostle, how "the righteousness which is by faith in Christ *is witnessed by the Law and the Prophets*^b:" but we prefer confining our views to the precise idea that was in the Apostle's mind, because we then have more clearly the mind of the Holy Ghost. This then we shall do, whilst we endeavour to shew,

I. What is that Gospel which is preached to us in common with the Jews—

To the Jews were sent "the glad tidings" of a promised rest—

[The promise given them included three things, *deliverance, preservation, rest*; deliverance from Egypt, preservation in the wilderness, and rest in Canaan. Their deliverance was to be by the blood of the paschal lamb, which, being sprinkled on their door-posts, was to protect them from the sword of the destroying angel, whilst all the first-born of Egypt were slain. That it was which burst their bands asunder, and caused their former masters not merely to liberate them from their bondage, but to thrust them out from amongst them: and from that time they were in all future ages to kill and eat the paschal lamb in remembrance of that great deliverance. From thenceforth, committing themselves to the Divine guidance and protection, they were to subsist entirely on the manna given them from the clouds, and on the water that issued from the rock. At the expiration of the time appointed for their sojourning in the wilderness, they were to enter into Canaan, there to serve and enjoy God as their God to the latest generations.

^b Rom. iii. 21, 22.

Now all this was to the Jews "a shadow of good things to come:" it marked the ways and means of our redemption; the nature of that life of faith which we are to live, and the happy termination of our labours. And, that it was so understood by the more spiritual among them, is evident, as from many other passages, so particularly from that quoted both in the foregoing and following context: for if the rest promised by Moses had had no reference to any thing beyond the land of Canaan, David could never, after that rest had been enjoyed for five hundred years, have spoken of a rest yet future. Consequently, the typical nature of that whole dispensation was made known to them; and though obscurely, yet certainly, was the Gospel of Christ preached to them.]

To *us* is the same rest presented as an object of faith and hope—

[We are to be *delivered* from a worse than Egyptian bondage, even from the bonds of sin and Satan, death and hell. And in the very same manner also are we to be delivered. "Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us:" and by the sprinkling of his blood on our hearts and consciences are we to escape the wrath of God. "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins^c." The destroying angel has received his commission against all on whom this mark is not found: and he will execute it on all without partiality or reserve: for, as "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins," so it is by a believing application of that blood to our souls, and by that only, that we can ever obtain from Christ the benefits of his salvation.

Our *preservation* during the whole of our pilgrimage must also be secured in the same way. Whilst under the guidance and protection of our God, we must "live altogether by faith on the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us." Our blessed Lord himself has told us, that HE is the bread of life: that we must live from day to day upon him, even as the Israelites did upon the manna in the wilderness; and that, whereas they derived from it only the temporary support of their mortal bodies, we shall secure from him the eternal welfare of our souls. St. Paul also tells us, that the rock which poured forth its waters in the wilderness was Christ; that is, a type and figure of Christ: we learn therefore from this, that we are to look to Christ for daily supplies of his Spirit, to renew and sanctify us, and to refresh and comfort us throughout the whole of our weary pilgrimage. This is to be the one constant tenour of our way from first to last. Never till we

^c Eph. i. 7.

arrive in the promised land shall we cease to need these supplies, which are to be brought to us by the exercise of a lively faith. There is no substitute for them: the life of the Israelites in the wilderness is a perfect pattern of our life; and to theirs we are taught to conform our own.

To "the *rest* which remaineth for us^d" we are taught to look forward with high expectations and assured confidence. There is a better country than Canaan, even heaven itself, which the patriarchs, to whom the land of Canaan was promised, themselves regarded as their destined home^e. And to that must we look as our inheritance. "There, we shall rest from all our labours:" there, shall all tears be wiped away from our eyes. There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain: but, having his tabernacle with us, we shall dwell with him and he with us more intimately than we have now any conception of, we being his acknowledged people, and he our endeared God, for ever and ever^f.]

But as this Gospel has never yet produced what it was destined to accomplish, it will be proper to shew,

II. To what must be ascribed its inefficacy both in them and us—

The Gospel itself is not destitute of power: it is "the rod of God's strength:" it is "quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword:" it is "mighty through God to the pulling down of the strong-holds of sin and Satan:" it is the power of God unto salvation to all who truly believe it. Yet its operations have been very limited and partial. And whence arises this? I answer,

The Jews "mixed not faith with what they heard"—

[Moses from the beginning told them of all the blessings which God had in reserve for them: yet from the beginning they were an unbelieving people. Though Moses had given them abundant evidence of his divine mission, they murmured against him, when they found their burthens augmented in consequence of his interposition^g. When they had seen all the wonders wrought in their behalf in Egypt, they again complained, as soon as ever they saw the hosts of Pharaoh

^d ver. 9.

^e Heb. xi. 9, 10, 13—16.

^f Rev. xxi. 3, 4.

^g Exod. v. 21—23.

pressing upon their rear, and ready, as they thought, to overwhelm them^h. When they had passed through the sea on dry ground, and seen their enemies, who presumed to follow them, dead upon the sea shore, they were still as unbelieving as ever, and regretted that they had ever been induced to leave the land of Egypt. They even questioned "whether God were amongst them or notⁱ." But a few weeks afterwards they altogether renounced God, and worshipped the golden calf. Thus it was on all occasions: whenever any fresh difficulty arose, they distrusted God, and murmured against him. When the spies brought their report of the land which they had searched out, the people universally gave way to despondency, as much as if they had never seen any one display of God's power in their behalf. On this account they were all doomed to perish in the wilderness, "God swearing in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest." In a word, "they could not enter in because of unbelief^k."

We also are alike unbelieving in relation to the truths we hear—

[The very necessity of redemption is denied by multitudes, or at least is acknowledged only in a speculative way, and without any due sense of its importance. The Jews under the pressure of their burthens cried mightily to God, so that their groans entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts. But when has he heard from us those sighs and groans by reason of the pressure of our sins? When has he heard those earnest cries for *deliverance* from the guilt we have contracted, and from the power of our in-dwelling corruptions? Alas! when urged on these subjects, we reply in our hearts, "Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians^l." If told, that "the whole world lieth in wickedness," and that we must flee from it, as Lot from Sodom, if we will escape its ruin, we despise the warning, like the sons-in-law of Lot, and regard our monitor as "one who only mocks us" with absurd and groundless alarms.

If brought to give a general assent to the truths we hear, we still do not approve of a life of faith as the means of our final *preservation*. Why must we subject ourselves to so many trials and difficulties? Why may we not go in an easier way to heaven? Why must our separation from the world be so entire? Why may we not still enjoy the leeks and onions of Egypt, instead of subsisting upon the light and tasteless food provided for us? Why must we be so dependent? Why be looking every day and hour to the pillar and cloud for

^h Exod. xiv. 11, 12.

^k Heb. iii. 19.

ⁱ Exod. xvii. 3, 4, 7.

^l Exod. xiv. 12.

direction, and never to follow my own way? Why am I to have nothing in myself, but all in Christ? Why should I be necessitated to seek such a measure of sanctification, as not to entertain a "thought that is not brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ?" We choose to have greater liberty, and an easier path. We choose to have a less humiliating way, where we may derive some supplies from a stock of our own, and be able to ascribe some measure of credit to ourselves.

Nor are we by any means satisfied with the *rest* that is provided for us; we wish for some rest in earthly things; and murmur at the prohibition to seek it in them. Why must I have as the one object of my desire a portion that is invisible? Of the Israelites it is said, "they despised the pleasant land; they believed not God's word^m:" and the same may be said of us. We do not estimate aright the felicity of heaven: we do not despise every thing else in comparison of it: we do not follow after it with the ardour that we ought: we shew, in the whole of our life and conversation, that we do not think the prize worth the toil necessary to secure it. Were we duly impressed with the excellency of Canaan as "the glory of all lands," we should grudge no labours or sufferings that we may have to encounter in our way to it, nor any exertions that may be necessary for the attainment of it.

What I have here said is applicable to the great mass even of the Christian world: and the true reason of their being so little influenced by all that they hear, is, that they do not mix faith with it: they either account it a cunningly-devised fable, or else imagine that some way shall be found for the salvation of their souls besides that which is revealed in the written word. They believe not what God has spoken either of the way, or of the end; and therefore they fall short of that end, and perish in their unbelief]

To impress this subject the more deeply on our minds,

I will endeavour to IMPROVE it,

1. In a way of solemn inquiry—

[It surely is reasonable for all of us to inquire, What have we "profited by the Gospel?" If we have indeed been profited by it, we can tell, in some degree at least, what are the benefits which we have received from it. To imagine that we have been really benefited, and not to know wherein we have been benefited, and especially in a matter of such infinite importance, is palpable and wilful self-deception. I ask then, wherein have we been profited by the Gospel? What effect has it produced upon our minds in relation to the things before

^m Ps. cvi. 24.

spoken of? What have we experienced of a spiritual redemption? What are we yet daily experiencing of a life of faith upon the Son of God? and how far does the prospect of eternal glory animate us to do and suffer all things for the attainment of it? I pray you, brethren, put these questions to yourselves, and satisfy not yourselves with a superficial or evasive answer. Bring forth the benefits which you have received: examine them: see how far they are of a saving nature, and bear the stamp and character of a work of grace upon the soul!—If such inquiries be unnecessary, trouble not yourselves about them: but, if they will be made at the last day by the Judge of quick and dead, and will form the ground of your salvation or condemnation to all eternity, then let them be duly weighed, and impartially answered by every one of us: for, if we be not profited by the Gospel now, sure I am that we shall not be profited in the eternal world; yea, rather, that very “word which ought to have been to us a savour of life unto life, will be to us a savour of death unto deathⁿ.” You all remember how greatly the guilt of Bethsaida and Chorazin was aggravated by their misimprovement of the privileges which they enjoyed under the ministry of our Lord: being exalted to heaven in their privileges, they were cast down the deeper into hell for their abuse of them^o. The Jews in general too would not have had sin, *comparatively*, if they had not enjoyed the ministry of our blessed Lord: but that left them without excuse^p. And even they will be innocent in comparison of you, if you, with the yet fuller light that is shining round you, neglect to improve the day of your visitation^q.]

2. In a way of affectionate remonstrance—

[It is clear and manifest, that the great mass of Christians do not mix faith with what they hear: for, if they did, they would obey it. Faith has the same respect to the proper objects of faith, as reason has to the proper objects of reason. From reason, we know that some things will be beneficial to the body, and other things injurious: and in accordance with its dictates we act, unless we are violently impelled in opposition to them, by some more operative principle in our minds. So will faith act. If we be blinded and overpowered by sense, we are then under the influence of unbelief. And if this be the predominant principle in our minds, O! think how awful will be our state! Verily, if this be of all sins the least criminal in appearance, it is of all sins the most fatal in its tendency: for whilst other sins render us obnoxious to God’s

ⁿ 2 Cor. ii. 16.

^o Luke x. 13—15.

^p John xv. 22.

^q Matt. xii. 32.

displeasure, this binds them all upon us, and precludes, as long as it is in exercise, all hope and possibility of obtaining mercy. See its operation as marked in our text. Methinks we have here the veil of the invisible world drawn aside. We are in the habit of sending all to heaven; but here we see how few in comparison do really attain the promised rest. Of all the six hundred thousand Israelites that were advanced to manhood, two only were suffered to enter into Canaan. All the rest (with the exception of the Levites) fell short through unbelief. And this is recorded as a warning to us, that we buoy not up ourselves with delusive expectations, in reference to our final state^r. We can never alter that word, "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." I entreat you therefore to "mix faith with what you hear" from the infallible records of God's word. Mix faith with it, I say, in the same intimate and influential manner as you mix reason with the deductions of reason. Your reason soon makes you flee from a house that is on fire, and to run to a place of safety from one that seeks your life: let your faith operate in like manner, without delay; stimulating you to flee to Christ for safety, and to lay hold upon the hope that is set before you in the Gospel.]

^r 1 Cor. x. 1—6, 11. Jude, ver. 5.

MMCCLXXXIII.

THE REST THAT REMAINS FOR GOD'S PEOPLE.

Heb. iv. 9. *There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.*

THE servants of God possess many distinguished privileges. Their state in this world is far happier than that of the ungodly; but there is an infinitely richer portion reserved for them hereafter. To this David had respect in that awful denunciation^a, whence it appears, that though prefigured by other rests, it remains yet to be enjoyed^b.

^a Ps. xcv. 11.

^b The Apostle's argument seems to be this: God instituted a day of rest in commemoration of his having ceased from his works of creation. And many centuries afterwards he promised a rest to his people in the land of Canaan. But that rest was only typical of a more glorious sabbath, of which David spake a long time after the other had been enjoyed. From hence the Apostle concludes that there

I. Who are the people of God ?

This title cannot belong to all indiscriminately—

[The greater part of the world are idolatrous heathens. The generality of those who are called Christians are ignorant of God. Impiety and profaneness abound in every place: this indisputably proves the Apostle's assertion^c. The sinful works of men plainly shew whose people they are^d; nor do all who "profess godliness" really belong to God^e. There are many who deceive both themselves and others^f.]

Those who alone have a right to it are described by God himself^g.

They "worship God in the Spirit"—

[It is the characteristic of God's enemies that they neglect prayer^h: nor will formal services prove us to be God's peopleⁱ. No worship is acceptable to him but that which is spiritual^k. His faithful servants are importunate at the throne of grace^l.]

They "rejoice in Christ Jesus"—

[They do not merely acknowledge him to be the Messiah: they make daily application to him as the only ground of their hopes. Their hearts are lifted up with devout affection towards him. They delight in him as their all-sufficient Redeemer^m.]

They "have no confidence in the flesh"—

[They are deeply convinced that "in them dwelleth no good thing." They see the folly of trusting to their own strength or wisdomⁿ. They acquiesce fully in Solomon's direction^o—. They look for every thing in Christ alone^p.]

To these belong many glorious privileges.

II. What is the rest which remaineth for them ?

They have already in some respect entered into rest^q—

[They are freed from the terrors of a guilty conscience^r.

must yet be a rest, or *Σαββατισμὸς* (for he changes the word which he had before used, in order more strongly to intimate the analogy between the different rests there spoken of) remaining for the people of God.

^c Rom. ix. 3.

^d 1 John iii. 8. John viii. 44.

^e Rom. ii. 28, 29. Tit. i. 16.

^f Rev. iii. 1. Jam. i. 26.

^g Phil. iii. 3.

^h Ps. liii. 4.

ⁱ Matt. xv. 8, 9.

^k John iv. 23, 24.

^l Eph. vi. 18.

^m 1 Pet. i. 8.

ⁿ Prov. iii. 5.

^o Prov. xxviii. 26.

^p 1 Cor. i. 30.

^q Heb. iv. 3.

^r Heb. x. 22.

They feel a delight in ordinances and Sabbaths. Their minds are fully satisfied with the Gospel salvation. They experience the truth of our Lord's promise^s —.]

But the rest which awaits them is far superior to that they now possess—

They will enjoy a freedom from all labours and sorrows—

[They are constrained to labour as long as they are in the world. Their whole life resembles a race or warfare. They can obtain nothing without strenuous exertions^t: and of necessity they are encompassed with many sorrows^u. But in heaven they will cease from their labours^x: nor will their happiness have any intermission or alloy^y.]

They will be exempt from all influence of sin or temptation—

[Sin now defiles their very best services. Satan is also unwearied in his endeavours to corrupt them^z. These are sources of much pain to them at present. But the souls of all in heaven are made perfect^a: nor can any unclean thing enter to defile them^b. Their triumph will be complete and everlasting^c.]

They will dwell in the immediate presence of their God—

[Their capacity of enjoying God will be wonderfully enlarged: they will behold him not darkly, as now, but face to face^d. The Saviour's glory will be the object of their devoutest admiration^e. Their delight in him will surpass their present conceptions^f. They shall know that their happiness will be eternal^g. Then will every desire of their heart be fully satisfied^h.]

INFER—

1. How desirable is it to be numbered among God's people!

[The rest described is the portion of them alone. God himself declares that the wicked have no part in itⁱ: their portion will be very different^k, and its duration also will be

^s Matt. xi. 28.

^t Matt. xi. 12.

^u Acts xiv. 22.

^x Rev. xiv. 13.

^y Rev. xxi. 4.

^z 2 Cor. xi. 3.

^a Heb. xii. 23.

^b Rev. xxi. 27.

^c Isai. lx. 20.

^d 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

^e John xvii. 24.

^f Ps. xvi. 11.

^g Rev. xxii. 3—5.

^h Ps. xvii. 15.

ⁱ Isai. lvii. 21.

^k Ps. xi. 6.

endless¹. Who then would not wish to be numbered with the saints? Who does not desire to participate their inheritance? But we must first be conformed to their character. We must renounce self-confidence, and believe in Christ. It was unbelief which excluded the Israelites from Canaan^m. Let us fear lest the same evil principle rob us of the heavenly restⁿ.]

2. With what delight may God's people look forward to death!

[The hour of death is often an object of terror to the godly, but it should be welcomed as a season of joy. Does not the husbandman rejoice in his wages, the mariner in his haven, the soldier in the spoils of victory? Much more should the Christian rejoice in the approach of his rest. Let us then long after it, like the holy Apostle^o; and let us labour to attain it in full confidence of success^p.]

¹ Rev. xiv. 11.

^m Heb. iii. 18, 19.

ⁿ Heb. iv. 1, 11.

^o 2 Cor. v. 2.

^p 2 Cor. v. 6, 8, 9.

MMCCLXXXIV.

THE WORD OF GOD QUICK AND POWERFUL.

Heb. iv. 12. *The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

THE state of a Christian's mind should be alike distant from slavish fear and from presumptuous confidence. He is authorized to entertain a confidence, because he has Omnipotence for his support, and the veracity of God pledged to supply him with all that is needful for his spiritual welfare. But he has need of fear also; because he is in the midst of temptations, and has a deceitful heart, ever ready to beguile him. In the view of his privileges, he may rejoice: but in the view of his dangers, he should tremble. In a word, he should, as David expresses it, "rejoice with trembling." This frame of mind is supposed by many to be unsuited to that full liberty into which we are brought under the Christian dispensation. But St. Paul continually inculcates the

necessity of it in order to a safe and upright walk: "Be not high-minded, but fear:" "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." But in no place of Scripture is this mixture of diffidence and affiance more strongly insisted on than in this and the preceding chapters. We are taught the indispensable necessity of "holding fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of hope, firm unto the end^a;" and yet we are again and again warned by the example of the Israelites, who were excluded from the promised land, lest we also should "fall after the same example of unbelief^b." It is in this view that the declarations in our text are introduced. There is an abruptness in them which renders the meaning of the Apostle somewhat difficult at first: but when the connecting link is supplied, the sense of the passage is clear, and very important. It speaks to this effect: The Israelites thought they had sufficient grounds for their unbelief; yet it ruined them. You also may be deceived by an evil heart of unbelief: but, however you may vindicate yourselves, that word, which you now disobey, will judge you in the last day; and will both expose your self-delusion, and justify God in passing against you a sentence of exclusion from the promised land.

The scope of the passage being thus explained, we propose to consider,

I. The description here given of the word of God—

Many able commentators have given it as their opinion, that, by "the word of God," we are to understand the Lord Jesus Christ, who is frequently called by that name in the Holy Scriptures. But St. Paul never speaks of Christ by that name: nor is there any mention of Christ in the context. On the contrary, the word of revelation is mentioned, as that which the Israelites would not believe^c; as that also which excluded them from the promised rest^d; and as that which speaks to us precisely as it did to them^e.

^a Heb. iii. 6.

^b ver. 1, 11.

^c ver. 2.

^d Heb. iii. 7—11.

^e ver. 7—9.

And the different things spoken of it in the text are far more suited to the written word, than to the Lord Jesus Christ. To that, therefore, we limit the description before us. Its properties are set forth,

1. In figurative terms—

[It is “quick,” that is, a living word. Our blessed Lord represents it in the same view: “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life^f.” And it is the very same term which Stephen also makes use of, when he calls the Scriptures “the lively oracles^g.” The word is not a mere dead letter, that will soon vanish away: it lives in the mind of God: it lives in the decrees of heaven: it liveth and will live for ever: nor will millions of ages cause it to be forgotten, or in the least enervate its force. All besides this shall wax old, and decay: but this shall endure, without the alteration of one jot or tittle of it, to all generations^h.

It is also “powerful.” Hear the appeal which God himself makes to us respecting it: “Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord: and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in piecesⁱ?” Yes: there is nothing that can resist its force.

But in the text it is compared with “a two-edged sword,” which, how sharp soever it may be, cannot penetrate like that. Frequently is it characterized by this image, especially as proceeding from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ^k. Yet does that image give but a very faint idea of its power: for a sword, though it may inflict a mortal wound, would be utterly incapable of dividing, with accuracy, the almost imperceptible organs of the human frame: but the word can “pierce to the dividing asunder the joints and marrow, yea, and the animal soul also from the rational spirit.” By this is meant, that there is nothing so hidden, which it cannot detect; nothing so blended, which it cannot discriminate.

This the Apostle proceeds to set forth,]

2. In plain language—

[The word is “a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Of the unregenerate man it is said, that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually^l.” The regenerate are “renewed in the spirit of their minds.” But still they are not so renewed, but that some imperfection cleaves to all which they do: there is something in every thought and every purpose of the human heart, something which still shews that man is a fallen creature, and which

^f John vi. 63.

^g Acts vii. 38.

^h 1 Pet. i. 23—25.

ⁱ Jer. xxiii. 29.

^k Isai. xlix. 2. Rev. i. 16.

^l Gen. vi. 5.

cannot stand the strict scrutiny of God's all-seeing eye. If he lay judgment for a line, and righteousness for a plummet, there is not any thing in which there will not be found some obliquity. Such a perfect standard is the word of God: "it will discern between the good and evil that is in the most holy thought of the most perfect of men." In the hand of "the Spirit, whose sword it is^m," its power is infinite, even though it be wielded by the feeblest arm. In the hand of the prophets, it "hewed" the hypocritical Jews in piecesⁿ. In the hand of the Apostles, it pierced thousands to the heart at once^o. In the hand of ordinary ministers, it has still the same power, and can so detect all the secret thoughts of men's hearts, as to evince that, it is indeed the very word of God himself^p, — — — and through him is still, as much as ever, "mighty to the casting down of the most haughty imaginations, and to the bringing of every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ^q."

But that which gives to this description its force, is,

II. The end for which it is adduced—

The Apostle means to say, that, however secret the workings of unbelief may be, they will all be detected and condemned by the word in the last day. Now,

Unbelief is a most subtle sin—

[It has ten thousand pleas and pretexts by which it clokes its malignity, and justifies to the mind and conscience its operations. See it in the Jews, whom it deceived to their ruin. There was always some great trial, some apparently insuperable difficulty in their way. They supposed that God would make all their way easy, and that they should have nothing to try their faith and patience. Hence they construed every difficulty as a violation of God's promises, and a prelude to his final dereliction of them. Hence also they made their appeals upon this subject with as much confidence, as if their conclusions were undeniable: and the chastisements which they received for their impiety only increased their complaints, as though, in addition to the disappointments of their legitimate expectations, they were treated with undeserved cruelty. Thus it is with us: we hide from ourselves, or rather we justify to ourselves, the workings of unbelief. Its operations all seem to us to be founded in truth and equity. If we look at God's

^m Eph. vi. 17.

ⁿ Hos. vi. 5.

^o Acts ii. 37.

^p 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25.

^q 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

threatenings, it cannot be that *they* should ever be executed, because such a procedure would be inconsistent with the Divine perfections, and an act of injustice towards man. If the promises of God be the object to which our attention is turned, they are too great, and too good to be performed; or at least, that they are not intended for such sinners as we. Besides, they are so far out of our sight, as to have, in our conceptions, little or no reality, in comparison of the objects of time and sense. Other sins we *excuse* as acts of frailty: but this we *justify*, as an act of wisdom.]

But, how subtle soever our unbelief may be, the word of God will discover and condemn it—

[The word of God is so comprehensive, that there is not in the whole creation a thought or purpose that does not come within its range^r: and it is so minute, that there is not the slightest “imagination of a thought,” of which it does not take cognizance. It is spiritual, even as the Author of it himself is spiritual; and, when it is brought home with power to the soul, it convinces a man of sins of which he had before not the least conception^s. As by a chemical process the constituent parts of material bodies may be discovered, so by the application of the word to our souls in the last day will every thought be decomposed, as it were, and its every particle of good or evil be disclosed^t. The fire that will try us will search the inmost recesses of the soul, and determine, with infallible precision, the quality of the most latent imagination there^u. Of this we have an earnest in the events which happened to the Jews in consequence of their unbelief. Thus God addresses them by the Prophet Zechariah: “our fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever? But my words and my statutes which I commanded my servants the prophets, *did they not take hold of your fathers?* and they returned and said, Like as the Lord of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us^x.” And the very same confession will, assuredly, be made in the last day by the most confident unbeliever in the universe: “His sin shall surely find him out^y,” and it shall then be seen, “whose word shall stand, God’s or his^z.” The counsels of every heart shall then be made manifest^a,” and God be justified before the whole universe in the sentence that he shall pass^b.]

From hence we may SEE—

^r Ps. cxix. 96.

^s Rom. vii. 9, 14.

^t John xii. 48.

^u 1 Cor. iii. 13.

^x Zech. i. 5, 6.

^y Numb. xxxii. 23.

^z Jer. xlv. 28.

^a 1 Cor. iv. 5.

^b Ps. li. 4. with Rom. iii. 4.

1. How attentive we should be to the word of God—

[Would we but inspect it with humility and care, it would be as a glass to reflect our own image, in a way that nothing else can do^c. And, is it not madness to neglect the opportunity it affords us of learning our true character, and of ascertaining, before hand, the sentence of our Judge? To what purpose is it to deceive our own souls? Will that word be altered? Will any other standard be brought forward whereby to estimate our state? Or shall we be able either to dispute its testimony, or avert its sentence? Dear brethren, remember the description given of it in our text: think how unavailing all your pleas and excuses will be, when its voice shall be raised against you: and now, ere it be too late, take it as a light to search all the secret corners of your hearts^d, and to guide your feet into the way of peace.]

2. How fearful we should be of unbelief—

[As there is no grace which so honours God, as faith, so there is no sin which so dishonours him, as unbelief. Other sins, though they oppose his authority, do not deny his right to command: but unbelief questions the very existence of his truth. Hence does St. John so frequently speak of it, as “making God a liar^e.” Ah! little do the sceptic and the unbeliever think what guilt they contract: and little do they imagine what chains they are forging for their own souls! How, I would ask, will any man get his sins forgiven? it can only be by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and by a living faith too: for it is not a dead faith that will suffice; but such a faith as unites the soul to Christ, and derives out of his fulness all that grace, and mercy, and peace which we stand in need of. Most awful is that declaration of God, that “all the fearful and unbelieving shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death^f.” Whether we believe this or not, it will prove true in the end: and the sentence, once denounced against Israel with an oath, shall again be repeated against all that abide in unbelief; “I swear in my wrath, that they shall not enter into my rest.”]

3. How earnestly we should pray to God for the gift of his Spirit—

[It is by the Spirit of God alone that we can either “be convinced of unbelief^g,” or be enabled to exercise a living faith^h. O! beg of God to give you his Spirit. Seek it in

^c Jam. i. 23, 24.

^e 1 John ii. 22. and v. 10.

^g John xvi. 8, 9.

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^d John iii. 19—21. Prov. xx. 27.

^f Rev. xxi. 8.

^h Eph. ii. 8. Phil. i. 29.

earnest; and you shall not ask in vainⁱ. It is the Spirit's office to "take of the things that are Christ's, and to shew them unto you^k." It is his office to make the word effectual to your souls: for it is then only effectual, when "it comes in demonstration of the Spirit and of power^l." Read not then, nor hear, the word in dependence on your own strength; but cry mightily to God to bring it home to your hearts "with power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance^m." Then shall you experience its life-giving efficacy, and find it "the power of God to the salvation of your soulsⁿ."]

ⁱ Luke xi. 13.^k John xvi. 14.^l 1 Cor. ii. 4.^m 1 Thess. i. 5.ⁿ Rom. i. 16.

MMCCCLXXXV.

GOD SEES OUR INMOST THOUGHTS.

Heb. iv. 13. *All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.*

MEN will commit those things in secret, which they would not commit, if they knew that the eye of a fellow-creature was upon them. But, if they duly considered the omniscience of God, they would be as watchful over their conduct in their most hidden recesses, as they now are in the noon-day. Yea, they would impose a far greater restraint on their inmost thoughts, than they now do on their outward actions. To fortify the Hebrews against apostasy, the Apostle endeavoured to impress upon their minds the thought that every motion of their hearts was strictly noticed by God.

From his words we shall consider,

I. The omniscience of God—

"There is not any thing in the whole creation which is not manifest in his sight." At one glance he beholds,

1. All things—

[All that is *past*, however long since, or however forgotten by us, is as fresh in his memory, as if it had been transacted this very moment^a. All *present* things, in whatever

^a Isai. xli. 22.

quarter of the globe, and however hidden from mortal eyes, are visible to him^b — — — All *future* events, whomsoever they concern, even the eternal states of all that ever shall be born, are known by him with as much certainty as if they were already accomplished^c — — —]

2. All men—

[The *actions* of men are not only noticed by him, but weighed in a most perfect balance^d — — — Their *words* are all distinctly heard by him, and recorded before him^e. Their very *thoughts*, how secret or transient soever they be, are also marked, and written by him in the book of his remembrance^f — — — The priests, when inspecting the sacrifices that had been *flayed* and *cut asunder*, did not so infallibly discern any blemish that might be found, either on their external part or in their inwards, as God discerns “every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts^g” — — —]

That we may not give our assent to this truth without being suitably affected with it, let us consider,

II. The concern we have in it—

The words of the text include a double interpretation—

We shall include both senses by observing,

1. “We have to do with God” in every transaction of our lives—

[The law of God extends to the whole of our conduct: every action therefore, with every word and thought, is an act of obedience to him or of disobedience: there is not a possibility of detaching ourselves from him for an instant, so as to assert our independence in the least respect. Our minds should be constantly full of love to him; and our every purpose and desire should have respect to his glory^h. How deeply then are we interested in approving ourselves to him! If we had merely to do with our fellow-creatures, it might suffice to have our actions right, even though there were some defect in our motives and principles; but when we have to do with the heart-searching God, we should be careful that every motion of our hearts be agreeable to his mind and will.]

^b Job xxviii. 24.

^c Isai. xlvi. 9, 10. Acts xv. 8.

^d 1 Sam. ii. 3. Job xxxi. 4.

^e Ps. cxxxix. 4. 2 Kings vi. 12.

^f Ezek. xi. 5. Gen. vi. 5.

^g Γυμνά καὶ τετραχλισμένα. This may be further illustrated by Ps. xi. 4. “his eye-lids try,” &c.

^h 1 Cor. x. 31.

2. We must “give an account to Godⁱ” of all that we do—

[Every thing we do is noticed by God, in order that it may be recompensed at the day of judgment^k. The book of his remembrance will assuredly be opened in that day^l; and every action, word, and thought, during our whole lives, will have an influence on his decision. However trivial any thing may be in our eyes, or even imperceptible by us, it will enhance our happiness or misery to all eternity: how anxious then should we be to walk as in God’s sight! and how should we labour daily to lay up an increasing weight of glory, instead of “treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath^m!”

We may IMPROVE this subject,

1. For the awakening of the careless—

[You may think, like those of old, that God does not see or regard your waysⁿ; but, if Achan was detected and punished by God’s immediate interference in this world^o, how much more shall you be in the day of righteous retribution!]

2. For the encouragement of the sincere—

[If God notices the defects of his people, he both makes allowance for them, and observes also their excellencies^p: nor have they so much as a good desire, which he does not mark with special approbation^q. Let all then stir up their hearts to seek and serve him^r: so, notwithstanding their defects, they shall receive his plaudit in the day of judgment^s.]

ⁱ Πρὸς ὃν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος. ^k Jer. xvii. 10. ^l Rev. xx. 12.

^m 2 Cor. iv. 17. with Rom. ii. 5. ⁿ Ps. xciv. 7.

^o Josh. vii. 14, 18, 25. ^p Comp. Ps. ciii. 14. with Rev. ii. 9.

^q Ps. xxxviii. 9. Mal. iii. 16. 1 Kings xiv. 13.

^r 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. ^s 1 Cor. iv. 5.

MMCCLXXXVI.

ENCOURAGEMENT DERIVED FROM THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

Heb. iv. 15, 16. *We have not an High-priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

NOTWITHSTANDING the excellency of the Christian religion, when compared with that of the

Jews, there were not wanting many specious objections, which a Jew might bring against it, and which, on a wavering and ill-instructed mind, might operate with considerable force. A Jew might, with some appearance of truth, say, 'We know that our religion is from heaven: we know that the sacrifices which we offer are of divine appointment: we see the priest actually making an atonement for us: we behold the high-priest carrying the blood of the sacrifice within the vail: and we hear him pronouncing the very benediction which God put into his mouth. You Christians lose all these advantages, and rely on mere notions of your own, which have nothing visible, nothing real.' But to these objections the Christian may reply, 'We have a better sacrifice, and a greater High-priest than you: and though we see neither the sacrifice nor the High-priest with our bodily eyes, we know he is entered into a better tabernacle, that is, into heaven itself, "there to appear in the presence of God for us:" and therefore do we "hold fast our profession," yea, and will hold it fast, whatever menaces, or whatever allurements, be employed to turn us from it.'

But if the greatness of our High-priest be sufficient to determine us, what will not the consideration of his goodness be? Let us but contemplate that, and we shall need nothing further to keep us steadfast even to the end: for we shall have a perfect assurance that we shall never want any thing that is requisite either for our spiritual or eternal welfare.

This is the idea suggested in the text; from whence we are naturally led to notice,

I. The character of our great High-priest—

Though he was "the Son of God," "Jehovah's Fellow," "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person," yet "He was in all points tempted like as we are."

[In bodily sufferings, he was tried with hunger and thirst, and weariness and pain; and had not even a place where to lay his head. As for persecutions from men, no human being

was ever pursued with such bitter unrelenting animosity as he. No terms were too vile to be applied to him: he was called "a glutton and a wine-bibber," a deceiver and blasphemer, a Samaritan and a devil: and the whole nation rose against him with that indignant cry, "Crucify him, crucify him." Of his assaults from Satan, what shall we say? What words can express the conflicts he maintained with all the powers of darkness, in the wilderness, and in the garden of Gethsemane, when through the agonies of his soul his whole body was bathed in a bloody sweat? From the hidings of his Father's face also, and from a sense of his wrath, when, as we are told, "it pleased the Lord to bruise him," his sufferings infinitely surpassed all that any created imagination can conceive. When his soul was sore troubled, even unto death, he prayed indeed for the removal of the bitter cup, yet drank it, when put into his hands, without complaint: but when he was called to endure the consummation of his misery in the hidings of his Father's face, he could not forbear pouring forth that heart-rending complaint, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Thus was he foremost in almost every trial that we can possibly be called upon to sustain; and notwithstanding in him was no sin, he was, far beyond any of the sinners of mankind, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."]

Having experienced in his own person all that we can feel, he sympathizes with us in all our trials—

[The double negation in our text is very expressive; and imports much more than a simple affirmation. Our High-priest is most assuredly a tender sympathizing Friend: and one great end for which he submitted to be tempted like us, was, that he might learn to appreciate aright our sufferings, and "be able to succour us in our temptations^a." He now can say, more emphatically than heretofore, "I know their sorrows^b;" and more justly may it be said of him, "His soul is grieved for the misery of Israel^c." So acutely does he feel for all his members, that "whoso persecuteth them, persecutes him^d;" and "whoso toucheth one of them, toucheth the apple of his eye^e." What he felt when he wept at the grave of Lazarus, he still feels, as it were, when he beholds his sorrowing and afflicted people. From whatever quarter their troubles arise, from men or devils, from body or from mind, yea, or even from the hand of God himself, his compassion is the same, and his sympathy is ready to exert itself for their relief.]

^a Heb. ii. 18.

^b Exod. iii. 7.

^c Judg. x. 16.

^d Acts ix. 4.

^e Zech. ii. 8.

Such being indisputably the character of our High-priest, let us contemplate,

II. The encouragement to be derived from it in all our addresses at the throne of grace—

The thought of having such an High-priest passed into the heavens to further our cause in the presence of his God, emboldens us to come to God himself,

1. *Without fear*, as arising from a sense of our own unworthiness—

[Had we not such an Advocate, it would be impossible for us to draw nigh to God with any hope of acceptance. To such unholy creatures as we, God would be nothing but “a consuming fire.” But, when we recollect what a sacrifice our great High-priest has offered, and that “he is entered into heaven with *his own* blood,” and that he pleads the merit of that blood in behalf of his believing people, how can we doubt of acceptance through his prevailing intercession? Be it so, our sins have been most heinous: yet are we assured, that “his blood will cleanse from *all* sin,” and that they who are washed in it, shall be as wool, and their crimson sins be white as snow. Had we the guilt of the whole world accumulated on our own souls, still need we not despair, since he who is our Advocate is also “a Propitiation for us, and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world^f.” If the blood of bulls and goats prevailed for Israel to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God^g. With such an Advocate we have nothing to fear. We are sure that “him the Father heareth always:” and that “he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them^h.” He has the names of all his people on his breastplate, and on his heart: and the chief of sinners may be as confident of acceptance through him, as those who have comparatively little to be forgivenⁱ.]

2. *Without doubt*, as arising from the greatness of the things we have to ask—

[All that we can need is comprehended in two things, “mercy and grace;” the one, for the pardon of our past transgressions; the other, for the preservation of our souls from sin

^f 1 John i. 2.

^h Heb. vii. 25.

^g Heb. ix. 13, 14.

ⁱ 1 Tim. i. 15, 16. ἐμοὶ πρότω.

in future. Now these are the very things specified in our text, as to be asked by us in the name of our High-priest with boldness and confidence: and we are assured, that they shall be granted, both in the time and measure that we need them. We are not to be accounting any thing too great to ask, because there is nothing too great for him to give. We "are not to be straitened in ourselves, seeing that we are not straitened in him." We may "ask what we will; and it shall be done unto us^k." However "wide we open our mouth, it shall be filled^l." Let our need of mercy be ever so great, "we shall obtain mercy;" and our need of grace ever so abundant, the supply shall be proportioned to our need. If we want grace to sustain suffering, to fulfil duty, to transform the soul into the Divine image, "Ask and have," is the Divine command: and our boldness in asking cannot be too great, provided it be of a right kind: it must not be of an unhallowed and presumptuous cast; but duly tempered with penitential sorrow, and patient resignation. Then it may rise to a confident expectation, and a full assurance of faith^m.]

But whilst we are thus encouraged to draw nigh to God, let us LEARN,

1. That nothing is to be obtained without prayer—

[It is not the death of Christ as our sacrifice, nor the intercession of Christ as our great High-priest, that will save us, if we do not pray for ourselves. Though he is on a throne, and that throne is a "throne of grace," we shall receive no benefit from his power or grace, if we do not sue for it in earnest and believing prayer. His offices are not intended to supersede our endeavours, but to encourage them, and to assure us of success in the use of the appointed means. Those are always characterized as "enemies, who call not upon God:" and we are warned plainly that we cannot have, if we neglect to askⁿ. The means must be used in order to the end; and it is only in, and by, the means, that the end can ever be attained^o. Hear this, ye who neglect prayer, or draw nigh to God with your lips only and not with your hearts! Unless "in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, you make your requests known unto God," you can never experience his blessing upon your souls, nor ever behold the face of your God in peace.]

2. That in all your addresses to God your eyes must be directly fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Mediator and Advocate—

^k John xiv. 13, 14.

^l Ps. lxxxix. 10.

^m Heb. x. 19—22.

ⁿ Jam. iv. 3.

^o Matt. vii. 7, 8.

[When the high-priest was passing through the veil into the holy of holies, the eyes of all were fixed on him as their mediator; and from his intercession all their hopes were derived. And how much more should our eyes be fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ as our Advocate and Intercessor! It is in his name that we are taught to offer our supplications^p: and it is through his intercession alone that they can come up with acceptance before God^q. Seek then at all times to realize this in your minds: and beg of God to make you deeply and abidingly sensible of it: for "then only do you honour the Father, when you thus honour his dear Son^r;" and then only will the Father be glorified in you, when he is thus honoured and glorified in the person of his Son^s.]

3. That when you thus approach God in and through his Son, all doubts of acceptance must be put away—

[We are not to be wavering in our minds when we draw nigh to God. To doubt either his power or his willingness to help us, is to disparage both the Father and the Son: and prayers offered with a doubtful mind will never bring with them an answer of peace^t. It is quite a mistaken humility that leads persons to question whether such sinners as they can find mercy; or whether the grace of Christ can be sufficient for them. All such doubts betray an ignorance of Christ, and his Gospel. If he be not the Son of God, equal with the Father, then we may well doubt his ability to help: or if his sacrifice and intercession be not the appointed means of salvation for the whole world, then we may ask, Can he save such a guilty wretch as me? But if all has been ordered of the Father, and the whole work of redemption has been executed by the Son, then must we "not stagger at any of the promises, but be strong in faith, giving glory to God^u." And according to our faith, so shall it be done unto us.]^x.

^p John xvi. 23—26.

^q John xvi. 6.

^r John v. 23.

^s John xiv. 12.

^t Jam. i. 6, 7.

^u Rom. iv. 20.

^x If this be the subject of a *Charity Sermon*, the following may be inserted in the place of the last inference.

3. That whilst we derive such comfort from him, we should labour to imitate his example—

[He suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should "follow his steps." He requires us to "love one another, as he has loved us;" and, if need be, to "lay down our lives for the brethren." And is there not a call for our sympathy at this time? (Here set forth the particular occasion and urgency of it.) Let us then shew that we "possess the mind that was in Christ Jesus," and labour to the uttermost to extend to our brethren such aid as shall be suitable and sufficient for them.]

MMCLXXXVII.

CHRIST BENEFITED BY HIS OWN SUFFERINGS.

Heb. v. 7—9. *Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.*

THE priestly office, as marked out by God, belonged exclusively to the tribe of Levi. Yet our Lord, though he was not of that tribe to which the priesthood appertained, was truly and properly a High-priest. He was constituted a priest of a different order from that of Aaron, and executed the duties of the priesthood in a far different manner than it was possible for any other person to perform them. He offered not the blood of bulls and of goats, but his own body, for the sins of the world. The Apostle describing the manner in which he ministered, sets before us,

I. His conduct under his sufferings—

Never were the sufferings of any creature comparable with those of Christ—

[His bodily sufferings perhaps were less than many of his followers have been called to endure^a; but those of his soul were infinitely beyond our conceptions^b: the assaults of Satan, and the wrath of God, combined to produce that bloody sweat in the garden of Gethsemane^c.]

Under them he poured out his heart in prayer unto his heavenly Father—

[He never lost sight of God as his Father, but addressed him with the greater earnestness under that endearing title^d:

^a It is possible indeed that the perfect temperature of his body might give a more exquisite sensibility to the organs; but this is no where affirmed in Scripture.

^b Ps. xxii. 14, 15. with Matt. xxvi. 38.

^c Luke xxii. 44.

^d Mark xiv. 36.

he knew that his Father was "able to save him from death:" he therefore repeatedly besought him to remove the bitter cup, and urged his petitions "with strong cries and floods of tears;" not that he repented of the work he had undertaken; but only desired such a mitigation of his sufferings as might consist with his Father's glory, and the salvation of men^e.]

Nor did he desist from prayer till he had obtained his request—

[Him the Father always heard, nor was an answer now denied him: he was delivered from that which he chiefly deprecated^f. Though the cup was not removed, he was not suffered to faint in drinking it: he was strengthened by an angel in answer to his prayer^g, and clearly shewed what an answer he had received, by the dignified composure with which he immediately resigned himself into the hands of his enemies^h.]

His sufferings indeed could not be dispensed with; but they were amply recompensed by,

II. The benefit he derived from them—

The benefits accruing to our Lord from his own sufferings were,

1. Personal—

[It was necessary for him as our High-priest to experience every thing which his people are called to endure in their conflicts with sin and Satanⁱ. Now the difficulty of abiding faithful to God in arduous circumstances is exceeding great: this is a trial which all his people are called to sustain, and under it they more particularly need his almighty succour; this therefore he submitted to learn. Though as the Son of God he knew all things in a speculative manner, yet he could not know this *experimentally*, but by being reduced to a suffering condition; this therefore was one benefit which he derived from his sufferings. He learned by them more tenderly to sympathize with his afflicted people, and more speedily to succour them when imploring his help with strong crying and tears^k.]

^e John xii. 27, 28. As a *man*, he could not but feel, and as a *good* man, he could not but deprecate, the wrath of God: but he desired nothing that was inconsistent with the Divine will, Matt. xxvi. 39.

^f The learned differ about the sense of ἀπὸ τῆς ἐνλαβείας; some translate it *pro reverentiâ*, others *ex metu*. See Beza on Heb. v. 7.

^g Luke xxii. 43.

^h John xviii. 4—8, 11.

ⁱ Heb. ii. 17.

^k Heb. ii. 18.

2. Official—

[As the priests were *consecrated* to their office by the blood of their sacrifices, so was Jesus by his own blood¹. From that time he had a right to impart salvation: from that time also he exercised that right. The persons indeed to whom alone he is “the author of eternal salvation,” are, “those who obey him.” Not that they possess this qualification *before* he vouchsafes his mercy to them; but he invariably transforms his people into his own image, and makes them, like himself, obedient unto death^m.]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. What we should do under sufferings, or a dread of God’s displeasure—

[We should not hastily conclude that we are not his childrenⁿ: we should rather go with humble boldness to God as our Father^o; we should plead his gracious promises^p; nor can we possibly be too earnest, provided we be content that his will should be done. (Alas! that there should be so little resemblance between our prayers and those of Christ!) We should however consider *that* as the best answer to prayer, which most enables us to glorify God.]

2. Whither to go for salvation—

[The Father was “able to save his Son from death,” and doubtless he can save *us* also; but he has exalted his Son to be a Prince and a Saviour^q. To Christ therefore we are to go, and *to the Father through Christ*^r. In this way we shall find him to be the author of eternal salvation to us^s.]

3. What is to be our conduct when he has saved us—

[Jesus died “to purchase to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.” We must therefore *obey* him, and that too as willingly in seasons of severe trial as in times of peace: we must be content to be conformed to the likeness of our Lord and Master. Let us be faithful unto death, and he will give us a crown of life^t.]

¹ Τελειωθεὶς sometimes means “consecrated:” see Heb. vii. 28.

^m Phil. ii. 8.

ⁿ Heb. xii. 6.

^o Luke xv. 17, 18.

^p Ps. l. 15.

^q Acts v. 31.

^r Eph. ii. 18.

^s Heb. vii. 25.

^t Rev. ii. 10.

MMCCLXXXVIII.

THE SLOW PROGRESS OF MANY REPROVED.

Heb. v. 11—14. *We have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

THERE is in the Holy Scriptures a great diversity of truths suited to the various states and capacities of men. There are some so plain and simple, that "he who runs may read" and understand them: there are others so deep and mysterious, that persons of the strongest intellect and most extensive erudition are utterly lost in the contemplation of them. In human sciences, men of genius and penetration have a great advantage over those of a less cultivated and comprehensive mind; because the strength of their faculties enables them to prosecute their researches to a far greater extent than the others can: but in divine knowledge, it is not the most learned, but the most humble and heavenly-minded, person, that will make the greatest progress. Ignorance in divine things (especially among those who enjoy a faithful ministration of the Gospel) springs from wilful remissness, rather than from any want of capacity; and involves the offender in very deep guilt. It is on this ground that the Apostle reproves the Hebrews for their inability to receive what he had to say respecting Melchizedec and Christ. He represents their infantile state as the consequence of their own sloth, and as an occasion of considerable embarrassment to himself, since he knew not how to open to them the sublimer truths of Christianity, because they were yet so ill-instructed in its very first principles.

In explaining the drift of his address we shall,

- I. Inquire whence it is that men's progress in divine knowledge is so disproportioned to the advantages they enjoy—

That many who hear the Gospel are but little profited by it, is a melancholy and undeniable fact—

[That persons should continue ignorant when little else than heathen morality is set before them, cannot be wondered at. But many, who for a course of years have had "Christ crucified set before them," and have from time to time been addressed with the greatest plainness and fidelity, yet are surprisingly dark in their views of the Gospel. They think they understand the plan of salvation; and yet they confound things the most distinct^a, and disjoin things the most inseparable^b. But, when their notions are ever so clear and accurate, they still remain without any experimental acquaintance with the truths of God. They are "*unskilful*" in the word of righteousness." Whatever they profess to believe respecting the depravity of the heart, and "a life of faith upon the Son of God," they have not an *experience* of it in their own souls; so that they still need as much as ever to have "the first principles of the oracles of God" inculcated and enforced. "Considering the time" that they have been learning, "they ought to have been long since qualified to teach others;" and yet "have they need to be taught the very same things again" and again. They still need as much as ever to have "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little."]

The reason for this must be sought for in their own negligence—

[If this want of proficiency had existed only since the days of the Apostles, we might have ascribed it to the weakness and insufficiency of the teachers: nor are we disposed entirely to exclude *that* as a concurrent cause of the slow progress that is made amongst us. But the same complaints which we make, were uttered by the Apostles; and the want of proficiency in their hearers is imputed to their "*dulness* in hearing^d," and *slothfulness* in improving what they heard. You

^a They mix faith and works, either uniting them as joint grounds of our salvation, or making their works a warrant to believe.

^b They cannot conceive how the exercises of their own free-will must, as far as they are good, be ascribed to the agency of the Holy Spirit, while, as far as they are evil, they are not to be considered as the emanations of their own wicked hearts in concurrence with the agency of Satan.

^c ἀπειρος.

^d ἰωθοί.

are ready enough to hear; and perhaps, like Ezekiel's hearers, are pleased with the sound of the Gospel, as you would be with some delightful music^e: but are you careful to apply to yourselves what you hear? Do you examine yourselves by it? Do you labour to treasure it up in your hearts? Do you pray over it? Do you make it the subject of your conversation with your families, and of your meditations in the hours of retirement? Do you not, on the contrary, find, that, through your neglecting to harrow in the seed, "the birds of the air come and take it away;" or that, "through the cares and pleasures of this world, it is so choked that it never grows up to perfection? Yes; *this* is the reason of that slow progress which people make in divine knowledge: *this* is the reason that persons, who would account themselves idiots if they received so little benefit from instructions in any other branch of knowledge, continue mere "babes" throughout their whole lives.]

Having found the reason of men's unprofitableness under the ministry of the Gospel, we proceed to,

II. Shew the sad consequences arising from it—

The misimprovement of this talent is greatly overlooked among the sins we commit, or the evils we deplore. But,

1. It incapacitates men for receiving instructions—

["Babes" must have food suited to their age: if "strong meat" were administered to them, they could not receive it: instead of being profited by the deeper mysteries of the Gospel, or by a full exhibition of the divine life as it exists and operates in the hearts of more advanced Christians, they would very probably be injured: the display of light would be too bright for their organs; or, to use the metaphor in the text, the meat would be too strong for their digestive faculties. What a loss then is this to the persons themselves! What a loss too to many who would be greatly benefited by the stronger food, but who must have only milk presented to them, lest others, unable to partake of *their* repast, should be deprived of what is absolutely necessary for their subsistence!

Let this be duly considered; and it will surely prove an effectual incentive to diligence!]

2. It imposes a restraint on their instructors—

["We have many things to say, and hard to be uttered:" not that the difficulty lies in expressing them: but in reducing them to the comprehension of persons who are so "dull of

^e Ezek. xxxiii. 32.

hearing." When we speak to "those who are of full age," we can enter largely into every part of the Gospel; because "they, having their spiritual senses exercised by use and habit, can discern both good and evil." They have a clear perception of the things we say, just as a man has of things bitter or sweet. We need not be labouring always to prove that such or such things are bitter or sweet; because they see in an instant the true and proper quality of the things that are set before them: they understand the analogy of faith; and are prepared to follow us as far as God enables us to lead them. But, however delightful such deep researches might be, we dare not, except in a very sparing manner, prosecute them. We are forced to use the same caution as Christ did towards his hearers^f; and as St. Paul did in addressing the Church at Corinth: "I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual; but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it; neither yet now are ye able^g."

And is not this a sad effect of men's "dulness?" Is it not an injury to us, as well as unto them? Would not our own ability in ministering be increased, if we were more at liberty to search into "the deep things of God" for their instruction? And would not the growth of all be more speedily advanced?

Let this then be an additional motive for diligence. When you see how extensive and lamentable are the consequences of supineness, learn, in pity to yourselves and to the whole Church of God, to press forward with increasing earnestness and zeal.]

ADVICE—

1. Let us improve to the uttermost the advantages we enjoy—

[God notices how long, and how often, we have the means of grace afforded us; and he will call us to an account for them as talents committed to our charge. And if the Gospel we hear be not "a savour of life unto life, it will be a savour of death unto death^h." The opportunities of improvement which the Jews had under the ministry of our Lord, rendered their guilt and punishment more aggravated than that of Sodom and Gomorrhahⁱ. The Lord grant that such may never be the effects of our ministry on you!]

2. Let us not be satisfied with low attainments—

[It is doubtless a mercy to be "babes in Christ," *if we be really such*. But what parent in the universe, however pleased

^f John xvi. 12.

^g 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2.

^h 2 Cor. ii. 16.

ⁱ Matt. xi. 20—24. with xii. 41, 42.

with the birth of a child, would take pleasure in it, if, instead of growing towards manhood, it always retained its infantine weakness and stature? Can God then behold with complacency such a monster in his family? Does he not expect that, from "children we become young men, and from young men we advance to be fathers in his Church^k?" Let us then have our "spiritual senses exercised:" let us endeavour to have them matured "by use and habit:" let us get a nice "discernment of good and evil." Let us "desire the sincere milk of the word," not merely that we may be satisfied with it, but that we may *grow* thereby^l, and be qualified for the reception of stronger food. "In malice," or any other kind of evil, "be children; but in understanding be men^m."

3. Let us make a good use of the attainments we already possess—

[They who themselves "need to be taught the first principles of the oracles of God," have no pretensions to set up themselves as teachers of others: and it is much to be lamented that *such* teachers should ever be admitted into the Church of God; or, when admitted, be suffered to retain their office. But all who are taught of God, "*ought*" to exert themselves in teaching others. We say not, that all are to become preachers of the word: but we say, that all should endeavour to instruct their friends, and their neighbours, and more especially their children and dependentsⁿ. In labouring thus to *do* good, they would *get* good; and "in watering others, they would themselves be watered" with the dews of heaven^o.]

^k John ii. 12—14.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 2.

^m 1 Cor. xiv. 20.

ⁿ Rom. xv. 14. Heb. iii. 13

^o Prov. xi. 25.

MMCLXXXIX.

GOING ON TO PERFECTION.

Heb. vi. 1—3. *Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit.*

IN arts and sciences of every kind, the greatest proficient feels a need of improvement: their very advancement only serves to shew them how little they know, and to increase their zeal in the pursuit

of higher attainments. But in religion, every one thinks he knows enough, and is content with the progress he has already made. What we learned in our early youth serves, for the most part, as a sufficient stock to carry us on through life; and the habits which we have acquired in our place and station satisfy our minds, so that we are ready to ask, "What lack I yet?" But surely this is not right. If, as the Apostle John informs us, there are diversities of age and stature in the Christian life, and in the Church there are little children, young men, and fathers, it surely does not become us to remain all our days in a state of infantine weakness and ignorance, as if that were the full measure that God had authorized us to expect. St. Peter expressly tells us, that we should "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." And in the preceding context, the Apostle complains of his Hebrew converts, that "whereas, from the time since their conversion, they should have been qualified for teachers, they had need to be taught again the very first principles of the oracles of God; and were become such, as still had need of milk, rather than of strong meat^a." But, as there were some of them who were no longer "babes, but had attained to full age, and by reason of use had their senses exercised to discern both good and evil," he would, for their instruction, "leave," as it were unnoticed, "the first principles" of the Gospel, and, by a fuller statement of its mysteries, "lead them on unto perfection^b." Now, "this will we also do, if God permit." My endeavour at this time shall be to shew,

I. What those principles are, the development of which we shall at present wave—

The first of these is, "Repentance from dead works"—

[This is so plain a duty, that no one who has ever heard the Gospel can entertain a doubt respecting it. Sin of every kind must be mourned over, as deserving of death; and must

^a Heb. v. 12.

^b Heb. v. 13, 14. with the text.

be utterly forsaken, as an object of our most unfeigned abhorrence.]

The second is, “Faith towards God”—

[This also is required, as indispensably necessary to salvation. Not only must we “believe that God is, and is a rewarder of all who diligently seek him;” but we must believe that he is reconciled to man through the Son of his love; and that “of those who come to him in his Son’s name, he will never cast out one.” This is God’s promise in the Gospel: and we must believe “Him faithful who has promised.”]

The two which are next specified, namely, “Baptisms, and the Laying on of hands,” are not additional *principles*; but *rites of the Jewish law*, by which the two foregoing principles were prefigured—

[Commentators have tried to explain these two as additional principles; and have represented the “baptisms” as signifying the baptisms of John and of Christ; and “the laying on of hands,” as referring to the imposition of the Apostles’ hands on men, for the purpose of communicating to them the gifts of the Holy Spirit, or of ordaining them to the blessed office of the ministry. But *they are no principles*; nor should we attempt to explain them as such. They are explanatory of the preceding words. By “baptisms,” we understand the “divers washings” which were observed under the law^c; which shadowed forth a cleansing from sin and dead works by repentance, or, as the Apostle expresses it, “the washing of regeneration:” and by “laying on of hands,” we understand the offerers of sacrifices laying their hands upon the head of their victim, in order to transfer to it their guilt, and express their hope of acceptance through it^d. It was in this way that they exercised their “faith towards God.” Now, then, put these two into a parenthesis, as being only illustrative and explanatory of the former two, and all the difficulties, in which commentators have involved the passage, will vanish.]

The third principle is, “the Resurrection of the dead”—

[This, also, is an essential part of “the doctrine of Christ.” It was indeed, though not very fully, revealed under the law: but under the Gospel it is declared with the utmost possible clearness and certainty; so that it may well be said, that “life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel^e.” The resurrection of our blessed Lord is indeed the one foundation

^c Heb. ix. 10.

^d Lev. iv. 4, 15, 24, 33. and xvi. 21.

^e 2 Tim. i. 10.

of all our hopes : and it has assured us, beyond a possibility of doubt, our own resurrection ; seeing that “ Christ was the first-firsts” of the harvest that shall in due season be gathered in^f.]

The last is, “ Eternal judgment ”—

[Temporal rewards and punishments were chiefly insisted on under the law ; but under the Gospel, we are taught to look forward to a day of future retribution, when “ God will judge the world by that blessed Jesus, whom he has ordained” to that office ; and will separate the wicked from the just ; consigning the one to everlasting misery, and exalting the other to everlasting blessedness and glory^g.]

The consideration of these principles we shall at the present wave—

[The importance of them cannot be doubted : for the Apostle speaks of them as a “ foundation which he had laid.” And every minister must inculcate them, with all possible earnestness. In truth, unless his mind be continually under the influence of these principles, a man has not the smallest right to call himself a Christian. He may have been baptized ; but he is no other than a baptized heathen, that has no part or lot in the Gospel salvation.]

Having, times without number, enforced these things on your attention, I now pass them over ; and proceed to the more immediate object of my discourse ; which is, to shew,

II. What are those sublimer views which it is our high privilege to contemplate—

Of course, we cannot in one discourse enter at all fully into this subject : we can only give some faint outline of it ; some hints, which may afford matter for your further meditation in secret.

By “ going on unto perfection,” the Apostle meant that he would unfold to them the deeper mysteries of the Gospel, which it was of great importance to them to comprehend. These mysteries he unfolds in all the remaining part of this epistle. We shall comprehend them under two heads :

1. The “ perfection” of Christ’s priestly office—

[The priesthood under the Mosaic dispensation was confined to the tribe of Levi. Of this our blessed Lord could

^f 1 Cor. xv. 20.

^g Matt. xxv. 32, 40.

not partake, because he was of the tribe of Judah. But a new order of priesthood was to arise, after the order of Melchizedec: and *this* was the priesthood to which Jesus was called. In all its offices it resembled the Levitical priesthood; by which it was, in fact, shadowed forth, in all its parts.

Our blessed Lord, as our great High-priest, *offered HIMSELF a sacrifice to God*. He was to expiate the sins of all mankind. Not all the cattle on a thousand hills were sufficient for that. But "a body was prepared for him" for that end; a body "like, indeed, unto sinful flesh," but altogether "without sin." This body he offered upon the cross; as the Apostle says, "He offered himself without spot to God." In reference to this, the Baptist pointed him out as "The Lamb of God that should take away the sins of the world:" and even in heaven he appears "as a Lamb that has been slain," and receives the adorations of all his redeemed people, on a perfect equality with the Father: "they sing, day and night, salvation to our God, who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever."

The high-priest, having offered the sacrifice, carried its blood within the vail, and there sprinkled it on the mercy-seat, and before the mercy-seat. Now, our blessed Lord was both the Sacrifice and the Priest who offered it: and having offered his own blood as an atonement upon the cross, he rose from the dead, and "*entered with his own blood into the heaven of heavens*," there to present it unto God in our behalf^h. With that blood he sprinkles, as it were, the mercy-seat of the Most High; and God the Father, beholding it, is pacified towards us; or, as St. Paul expresses it, "He is reconciled towards us by the blood of the crossⁱ."

Whilst within the vail, the high-priest *covered the mercy-seat with clouds of incense*: and this also our blessed Saviour does, *by his continual intercession*. "He appears in the presence of God for us," as our all-prevailing Advocate and Intercessor: and by his intercessions, founded on the merit of his own sacrifice, he obtains for us all those supplies of grace and peace which our daily necessities require: for "Him the Father heareth always."

Having fulfilled these offices within the vail, the high-priest came forth, clad in all his splendid garments, to bless the people. And so will our great High-priest come forth, in his own glory, and in all the glory of his Father, to complete the blessedness of his redeemed people. To all of them he will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."]

^h Heb. ix. 12.

ⁱ Col. i. 20—22.

2. The “perfection” of our privileges, as secured by it—

[This also the Apostle unfolds, though, alas! we have only time to specify one or two particulars. But through our great High-priest *we receive a full and perfect and everlasting remission of all our sins*. The forgiveness obtained by the Levitical sacrifices was only temporary. The very services by which it was obtained were only “a remembrance of sins” still unforgiven. But, “through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, we are sanctified once for all;” yea, “by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified^k.” God himself engages, by covenant, and by oath, that “our sins and iniquities he will remember no more^l.”

Through him, too, *we are admitted into the immediate presence of our God*. Not a soul was admitted into the holy of holies, except the high-priest; nor he, except on one day in the year. But “into the holiest of all have we access by the blood of Jesus, by that new and living way which he hath consecrated for us through the vail: and having him as our High-priest over the house of God, the Apostle says, “Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience^m.” There is not a sinner in the universe who may not thus come to the very mercy-seat of our God, where he shines forth in all his glory, provided only he come in the name of Jesus, and pleading the merit of the Redeemer’s blood.

The highest possible elevation, too, of which our nature is capable, is vouchsafed unto us through the intervention of our great High-priest. We are every one of us made both kings and priests: for in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female: all are on a level in this respect: all are partakers of the same privileges: all are now “a royal priesthoodⁿ,” and all shall ere long join in that triumphant song, “To Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen^o.”]

What now shall I say, as an IMPROVEMENT of this subject? I will say,

1. Press forward for higher attainments *in knowledge*—

[Do not imagine that you know enough of the Gospel: there are in it unfathomable depths, which even the angels in

^k Heb. ix. 13, 14. and x. 10, 14.

^l Heb. x. 17. compared with Heb. viii. 10, 12.

^m Heb. x. 19—22.

ⁿ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^o Rev. i. 5, 6.

heaven are continually “desiring to look into.” See what was St. Paul’s prayer in behalf of the saints at Ephesus, *whom he speaks of as eminent for their “faith in the Lord Jesus, and their love to all the saints:”* “I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you *the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints; and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward, who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead^v.*” Let this be your prayer for yourselves, my beloved brethren, however advanced ye be in faith and love. In truth, it is by your increase in knowledge that you are to increase in grace: for it is by your “comprehending with augmented clearness the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, *by comprehending this, I say, ye are to be filled with all the fulness of God^q.*”]

2. Press forward for higher attainments in holiness—

[“This I wish, brethren, even your perfection^r.” Rest not satisfied with any thing short of a perfect transformation into “the Divine image, in righteousness and true holiness.” Make this the ultimate object of your knowledge; and employ your knowledge for the production of it. St. Paul’s prayer for his brethren at Colosse will serve you as a model for your prayers, and as a standard for your endeavours: “Since the day I heard of your love,” says he, “I do not cease to pray for you, and to desire, that *ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light^s.*” You will scarcely think yourselves so advanced as the Apostle Paul: yet what does he say of himself? “*Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those*

^p Eph. i. 15—20.

^r 2 Cor. xiii. 9.

^q Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^s Col. i. 9—12.

things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded^t." Mark, I pray you: it is *to those who are perfect*, that he gives this advice. What advice, then, must be given to those who are so far from perfection as we are? Will it become *us* to stand still? I charge you, brethren, to indulge no listless habits, no self-complacent thoughts. Take this holy Apostle for your example: "Let your conversation be in heaven, whither your Lord and Saviour is gone before^u;" and rest not till you are changed into his image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of your God^x.]

^t Phil. iii. 12—15.

^u Phil. iii. 17, 20.

^x 2 Cor. iii. 18.

MMCCXC.

THE DANGER OF APOSTASY.

Heb. vi. 4—6. *It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*

IT is of great importance, in interpreting the Scriptures, to lay aside human systems, and to attend carefully to the connexion of any passage with the context; because a just view of the general scope of the passage will throw the best light upon any particular expressions contained in it. The words before us are confessedly difficult to be understood: but, if we adopt the mode of interpretation now proposed, we shall not err very materially in our explanation of their import. The Apostle has been reproving the Hebrews for the little progress which they had made in the divine life, considering the length of time since they were first initiated into the knowledge of the Gospel. He complains that, on account of their inability to comprehend him, he scarcely knows how to open to them the deeper mysteries of our religion^a; which however he must do,

^a Heb. v. 11—14.

for the benefit of those who could digest strong meat, and make a due improvement of the truths he should set before them^b. But, in the meantime, he warns them, that the neglecting to advance in religion is the surest road to apostasy; and that apostasy, after such attainments as they had made, would in all human probability issue in their eternal ruin^c. Then, illustrating that point by an apt simile^d, he proceeds to exhort them to put away sloth, and with all diligence to follow those who through faith and patience were now inheriting their promised reward^e. Hence it appears, that the attainments mentioned in the text are such as were found in persons recently converted and of doubtful character; especially because they are contrasted with other attainments which accompany and manifest a state of salvation^f.

In our further illustration of the text, we shall shew,

I. How far men may go in religion, and yet apostatize from it—

Confining ourselves to the words before us, we observe, that unstable persons may possess many enviable gifts—

[*Their minds may be “enlightened”* with the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus^g. There is not any thing which the most eminent saint can know, but it may be known by a hypocrite: the difference between them is not in the matter known, but in the manner of knowing it; the one assenting to it with his head; and the other feeling it in his heart.

Their affections may be moved by hearing and reading “the word of God,” and by considering the mysteries of the Christian dispensation, or the realities of “the invisible world^h.” Their hope, fear, joy, and sorrow may be called forth successively in a very powerful manner, according as they apprehend themselves to be interested in the promises of the Gospel, or obnoxious to its threateningsⁱ.

^b Heb. vi. 1—3.

^c ver. 4—6.

^d ver. 7, 8.

^e ver. 11, 12.

^f ver. 9, 10.

^g Compare Numb. xxiv. 3, 4. with Heb. x. 26.

^h “The world to come” may be taken in either of these senses. See Heb. ii. 5.

ⁱ Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32. Matt. xiii. 20, 21. John v. 35. Mark vi. 20. Acts xxiv. 25.

Their powers may be enlarged, as well for the discharging of duties which their unassisted nature would be unequal to perform, as for the working of miracles, to which no created power is competent. By “the heavenly gift,” or the *gracious* operations of the Holy Spirit, they may make some considerable advances in the divine life^k; and through his *miraculous* agency, “of which they may also be partakers,” they may do wonders that shall astonish all who behold them^l.

It is observable, however, that the Apostle expresses himself in terms calculated to convey rather a low idea of the attainments of these persons: he speaks of their “*tasting* of the heavenly gift,” and “*tasting* of the good word of God;” designedly intimating thereby, that they never lived upon the word as the *food* of their souls, or made religion their great solace and *support*, but contented themselves with a slight, transient, and superficial *taste* of both.]

Such persons may certainly become apostates from the truth—

[That they may “fall away” from *the practice* of religion, is evident from the instances of David and others, who, after a long experience of “the power of godliness,” have grievously departed from the path of duty. But they may also apostatize from even *the profession* of the truth. How many are there who “for awhile believe, and, in a time of temptation, fall away^m.” The instance of Demasⁿ, if there were no other, is very sufficient to prove, that men may possess, not only gifts, but graces too, and yet “return with the dog to his vomit,” and “draw back unto perdition^o.”]

Miserable, indeed, will their situation then become, on account of,

II. The extreme difficulty of renewing them again unto repentance—

To “renew them to repentance,” is a great and arduous work—

[If repentance were no more than a slight conviction of their folly in renouncing the truth, we might hope that a very little experience of the fatal change would bring them to it. But it implies a total renovation both of the heart and life — — — which is a work at all times difficult; but peculiarly so under their circumstances. It is said to be

^k 2 Pet. ii. 20.

^l Matt. vii. 22. with 1 Cor. xii. 11.

^m Luke viii. 13.

ⁿ Col. iv. 14. and Philem. ver. 24. with 2 Tim. iv. 10.

^o 2 Pet. ii. 22. Heb. x. 38, 39.

“impossible;” by which we are to understand, not that it is an *absolute*, but only a *moral*, impossibility. When our Lord declared that it was “easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven,” he explained himself by saying, “With man this is impossible; but with God all things are possible^a.” Thus, the recovery of such apostates is quite contrary to all reasonable expectation; nor can any thing but a most extraordinary interposition of the Deity effect it.]

What reason is there to hope that it should ever be accomplished in them?

Consider,

1. The dishonour they do to Christ—

[They who renounce Christianity do, in fact, proclaim Christ an impostor: they declare their approbation of the Jews who crucified him; and thus, as far as in them lies, they “crucify him afresh.” But we must not confine this to avowed infidels: the same is true respecting those who decline from the ways of God, and return to a worldly and carnal life: “they put Christ to an open shame:” they proclaim to all around them, ‘I once thought that it was my highest interest and happiness to serve Christ: but I was quite mistaken: I made the experiment; I became his follower; I loved him, served him, glorified him; but I found, after all, that I had given up a greater good for a less: I now am assured that Christ cannot make us happy; and, therefore, I have again returned to the world, and chosen it as the better portion: and, whoever would be wise or happy, let him follow my example; let him renounce religion as a needless restraint, and despise it as an enthusiastic delusion: let him lend all his powers and faculties to the pursuits of time, and the enjoyments of sense; and let him cast off the yoke of Christ as an intolerable burthen.’

Who can suppose that a man, after having cast such dishonour upon Christ, should ever be brought again to embrace and honour him? While he continues to reject the Saviour, his restoration to repentance is *absolutely* impossible; because, there is no way to repent, but by returning to Christ^a. And that he should return unfeignedly to Christ is *morally* impossible; because his way to Christ is barred up by shame, and fear, and almost every consideration that can influence the human mind — — —]

2. The despite they do to the Holy Spirit—

^a Matt. xix. 24—26.

^a Heb. x. 26, 27.

[This, though not adverted to in the text, is necessary to a just view of the subject, and is expressly mentioned in the same connexion in a subsequent part of this epistle^r. It is not possible but that such apostates must have experienced on many occasions “the strivings of the Holy Spirit” with them; they must have felt many secret checks and remonstrances of conscience; all of which they must have resisted, before they could prevail upon themselves to throw off their profession of religion, and to “make shipwreck of their faith.” In short, they must have altogether “quenched the Spirit,” and “seared their consciences as with a hot iron.” What prospect then is there that such persons should be renewed unto repentance? If they could not maintain their ground when they had the assistances of the Holy Spirit, how shall they recover it when he is departed from them? And what reason is there to hope that the Holy Spirit, whom they have so “grieved,” and “vexed,” by their misconduct, should again dwell in them, and increase his gracious communications in proportion as they have accumulated their transgressions? If the contempt which they pour upon this Divine Agent amount to what is called the sin against the Holy Ghost, their damnation is sure; it is decreed in heaven, and sealed by their own act and deed. And, though it fall short of this unpardonable sin, still is their case almost hopeless: they are like “the earth, which, bearing only thorns and briers, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned^s.”]

This awful subject must not be concluded without a few words of ADVICE—

1. Guard against the means and occasions of apostasy—

[He that would not fall must take heed to his steps, and be careful on what ground he treads. Now we are told by God himself, that worldly cares, worldly pleasures, worldly company are the bane of religion; and that we must guard against them all, if we would be steadfast in the faith. We quite mistake, if we think that nothing but what is palpably sinful in itself is dangerous: almost all apostasy arises from secret neglects of duty, and from a want of necessary self-denial. By going to the utmost boundaries of what is lawful, we are easily and imperceptibly drawn into what is unlawful. Therefore watch: watch against error; watch against temptation; watch against the cares and pleasures of life; watch against secret declensions: in short, “let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.”]

^r ver. 28, 29.

^s ver. 8.

2. Be not satisfied with low attainments—

[It was to enforce this idea that the warning in the text was introduced by the Apostle: and therefore it demands our peculiar attention. Persons who, like “babes,” are weak in the faith, are of course more liable to be turned from it: and if they do not grow towards an adult state, they will certainly decline. “Press forward then, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth unto that which is before” — — —]

3. Under any backsliding, apply instantly to Christ for grace and mercy—

[The warning in the text is not to discourage the humble, but to alarm the careless, and quicken the remiss. The Apostle does not say that repenting sinners, however they may have apostatized, shall not be forgiven; the danger is, that they will not repent; and not that, if they repent, they shall not be pardoned. Let not any then say, “I have fallen away, and therefore cannot hope for mercy;” but rather, “I have departed, and must return instantly to God in his appointed way.” God himself addresses us, “Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely.” Let a hope of acceptance aid your fears of final apostasy: so shall the end of God’s warnings be best accomplished, and the fulfilment of his promises secured.]

MMCCXCI.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FRUITFUL AND BARREN
PROFESSORS.

Heb. vi. 7, 8. *The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.*

COMPARISONS, when just, have the double effect of illustrating, and of confirming, any truth, which they set before us. They have not indeed the force of demonstration, when considered as arguments: but they are peculiarly calculated to impress the mind; and, in that view, have often a stronger effect than the clearest statements, or most logical deductions. Of this kind is the comparison in the text, which is adduced to illustrate the guilt and

danger of apostasy. It exhibits figuratively, in a way of contrast,

I. The benefit of ordinances when duly improved—

What is that improvement which God expects us to make of divine ordinances?

[Every one knows what benefit the cultivator of any land expects from showers which water the earth; he expects, whether in his field or garden, an increased production of those fruits which he has been labouring to obtain. And what does the great Husbandman labour to produce in the enclosures of his Church? Surely he looks for augmented penitence and contrition as of primary and indispensable importance — — — He desires that every child of man be brought to a more simple affiance in his dear Son, and to a more unre-served devotedness of heart and life to his service — — — He desires an increased mortification of all sin, and a progressive fruitfulness in all the fruits of righteousness, and a more perfect transformation into the Divine image — — —]

Where his ordinances are made subservient to this end, he will bestow the richest blessings—

[There is a peace which passeth all understanding, which God will confer in rich abundance — — — He will shed abroad his love in the heart of him who thus profitably waits upon him, and will give him such testimonies of his adoption into God's family, as shall dissipate all doubt or fear either of his present acceptance with God, or of his future fruition of the heavenly glory; yea, such testimonies as shall be a foretaste of that glory, a very beginning of heaven in his soul. In fact, whatever the devoutest worshipper in the universe can wish for, it shall be given him in answer to his prayer^a.]

But it is not to all that divine ordinances are thus blessed, as we shall see from,

II. The sad result of them when habitually mis-improved—

As in barren lands, so in the Church of God, the showers descend on many in vain—

[How many are there who, after years of culture under the richest ordinances, remain as earthly in their minds, as sensual in their habits, and as devilish in their tempers, as the very heathen, who have never once had the means of grace vouchsafed unto them — — — Their hearts are yet sealed up in

^a John xv. 7.

impenitence and unbelief, as much as if they had never heard of the Saviour's love, or received the offers of a free salvation — — —]

And what can these expect, but the curse of God upon them ?

[A man will not always cultivate a field that requites all his labours with nothing but "thorns and briers:" neither will God always bestow his care on those who hold fast their iniquities, and continue unchanged under all the efforts that are made for their salvation. He has told us that "his Spirit shall not alway strive with man^b," and that, "if his word be not a savour of life to the life of any soul, it shall become a savour of death to his death and condemnation^c." To this effect God warned his Church of old^d — — — And our blessed Lord has told us that a similar misimprovement of his Gospel will render our state worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrha^e — — —]

SEE then, brethren,

1. What matter here is for diligent inquiry—

[You see, and all around you see, the effects produced on the earth by fertilizing showers^f: and should not similar effects be found on you? See then whether you have, both in your heart and life, an evidence of the change which the Gospel produces on all who receive it aright, and to whom it comes with power? I must warn you of your responsibility to God for all the means of grace. You do not depart from the house of God the same persons that you were when you came into it. If you are not softened by the word of God, you are hardened by it: and if you are not brought nearer to God by it for the remission of your sins, you are driven farther from him, to your everlasting confusion^g — — —]

2. What reason here is for watchfulness and care—

[When you come to the house of God, remember that you come into the more immediate presence of the Deity; and that every word you hear, wings its way to heaven to record the manner in which it was heard. Pray therefore to God before you go thither, and whilst you are there under the ministry of the word, and when you depart thence, that the word preached may be accompanied with a divine energy, and prove "the power of God to the salvation of your souls." And, if at any time a favourable impression be made upon you, beware that you do not lose it. *It is in that particular view that the Apostle suggests the comparison in my text: and*

^b Gen. vi. 5.

^c 2 Cor. ii. 16.

^d Isai. v. 4—6.

^e Matt. x. 15.

^f Isai. lv. 10, 11.

^g Jam. i. 23—25.

I wish very particularly to put you on your guard, that you do not convert the blessing of God into a curse, and render the very means which he has bestowed for the salvation of your souls, into an occasion of deeper and heavier condemnation.]

MMCCXCII.

THE THINGS THAT ACCOMPANY SALVATION.

Heb. vi. 9—11. *But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.*

WHOMSOEVER we address, it is needful that we use at times the language of warning and admonition. For in a mixed assembly all are not alike upright: there will always be found some tares amongst the wheat: and even the most upright may derive benefit from counsels faithfully administered. Hence, in addressing the believing Hebrews, St. Paul warned them against the danger of apostasy; declaring, that, if they did not make a just improvement of the privileges they enjoyed, they would bring upon themselves an aggravated condemnation. But did he therefore conceive of them as hypocrites? No; he had a good opinion of their state: "he was persuaded better things concerning them," notwithstanding he thus addressed them: yet, whilst he acknowledged with gratitude their active piety, he urged them to abound in it more and more.

Under a similar persuasion in respect to many of you, and with similar desires in reference to all, we proceed to point out,

1. What are those things which accompany salvation—

Many things there are which are common both to the hypocrite and the true believer: but some things

there are which belong to the true believer exclusively, and which will assuredly issue in his everlasting happiness. Wherever there is genuine love to the saints for Christ's sake, there is salvation.

But to speak more particularly—

It must be a love to the saints as saints—

[There may be a strong attachment both to individuals and collective bodies, without any thing beyond the workings of nature. A great variety of considerations may give rise to the emotions of love, and the heart be as far from God as ever. Of course the bare existence of this feeling towards our fellow-creatures can be no just ground for concluding ourselves to be in a state of grace. Even love to the saints may exist on grounds which do not prove it to be of divine origin. We may love them because they are amiable in themselves, or kind to us, or an ornament of the party to which they belong. But when we love them purely because they are beloved of the Lord, and belong to him; when we love them as members of our own body; as partakers of the same divine nature with ourselves; and as heirs of the same glory; then we possess a grace which no hypocrite ever did possess; and which is inseparably connected with the salvation of the soul.]

But this love must be operative and laborious—

[Our love must “not be in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth:” it must be such as “works and labours in ministering” to the welfare of the objects beloved. Love of any kind is regarded as a mere pretence, if it exert not itself in such a way as to evince its reality by a corresponding practice: and much more will our pretensions to so high a principle as Christian love be deemed nugatory, if we labour not to display its efficacy by a suitable conversation. The temporal and spiritual comfort of the saints must be promoted by us to the uttermost. We are not to be indifferent to the welfare of any: but, whilst we “do good unto all men, we must do it especially unto the household of faith.” Nor must we do it merely occasionally, when more urgent circumstances arise to remind us of our duty: we must make it, as it were, our business to promote to the uttermost the edification of the body of Christ in general, and of all its members in particular. Nor must we shrink back from any “labour” that may be conducive to this end; or any sacrifice that may be requisite to the attainment of it. And it is only when our love is thus operative, that it approves itself to be a sure evidence of grace, and a certain pledge of glory.]

There is yet one more ingredient in this love, namely, that it must be exercised towards the saints for Christ's sake—

[It must be “shewed towards the name of our God” as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus. It is this which gives to love its chief excellence. Though the saints are ostensible objects towards whom it is exercised, yet it must in reality terminate on God in them. It is to *him* that every thing must be done: but as he personally is out of our reach, we are to do it to them as his representatives. He is to be the one great object in whom all our affections centre: and not being able to pour out our ointment upon his head, we must, in testimony of the desires of our souls, pour it out, as we are able, upon all his members.]

This principle so operating, most assuredly “accompanies salvation”—

[It is declared by our blessed Lord to be that whereby we may know to a certainty our own conversion^a, and may be distinguished for his people by all who behold us^b. Moreover, if we live in the exercise of this principle, we are assured by God himself, that “*we shall never fall*, but that an abundant entrance shall be ministered unto us into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ^c.” And so infallibly is the final salvation of the soul connected with it, that every exercise of it shall be remembered, “not so much as a cup of cold water given to a disciple in the name of a disciple, ever falling short of its reward.” Indeed, God would consider himself as “unrighteous, if he were to forget” to recompense these things in the eternal world. Not that any works of ours can claim any recompence on the ground of *merit*: but, on the ground of God's promises, we may be assured that salvation shall be given to us, if we live under the influence of this love: and we may expect it from him as a merciful, a faithful, and a “*righteous Judge*.”]

Such being “the things that accompany salvation,” we proceed to shew,

II. Our duty in relation to them—

It is the duty of all to abound in them—

[It is supposed in the text that the believing Hebrews had both possessed and exercised this love: indeed, it was from a persuasion of this that St. Paul was so well satisfied of their

^a 1 John iii. 14.

^c 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

^b John xiii. 35.

^d 2 Tim. iv. 8.

being in a state of acceptance with God. And we too must live under the habitual influence of this gracious principle, taking every occasion to manifest it towards the saints in acts of kindness both to their bodies and their souls. “We must walk in love, as Christ has loved us.”]

It is yet further our duty to persevere in these labours even “to the end”—

[We are “never to be weary of well doing:” never to think that we have done enough; or rather, never to think we have done any thing, as long as any thing remains to be done. We are not to be deterred by difficulties, nor to draw back on account of disappointments. In extending our labours of love to all the saints, we shall sometimes find that we mistake the characters of those whom we have endeavoured to serve: but we must not on this account neglect or intermit our duty. We may take the more care to discriminate between the different characters of men; but must on no account refuse to give the children their meat, because some portions of our bounty have been unwittingly wasted upon dogs. If any have abused our kindness, the loss is their own: but if we neglect to shew kindness, the loss is ours. We must never lay down the habit, but with our lives.]

In so acting we benefit ourselves no less than others—

[The exercise of love is, as has been observed, an evidence of grace, and *as such*, a foundation of hope. And the more the acts of love are formed into a habit, the livelier our hope becomes, till at last it grows into a “full assurance of hope.” We must again say, that it is not on our actions *as meritorious*, that our hopes are founded, but only as evidences of a true faith, and as evincing a state which God has promised to reward. But, having these evidences, we may as assuredly hope for glory, as if we saw the holy angels ready to bear our souls to the realms of bliss. “God is love: and, if we resemble him in this world, we may well have boldness in reference to the day of judgment^e.” “We know by it infallibly that we are of the truth; and therefore may on safe grounds assure our hearts before him^f.”]

Let me now, in APPLYING this subject to ourselves, tell you,

1. What is my “*persuasion*” respecting you—

[Of many “I am persuaded,” that they have these “things that accompany salvation.” Many manifest it in the whole of

^e 1 John iv. 16, 17.

^f 1 John iii. 19.

their life and conversation; and many more would manifest it, if they had the same opportunities as are offered to others. There can be no doubt but that the principle of love is deeply implanted in the hearts of many, who from various circumstances are unable to display it as they could wish. And we are assured, that God, who searcheth the heart, will bear witness to them in the last day, as well as to those who were able to carry into effect their good desires.

But, in reference to many, we have no such persuasion. Many do not even possess those things which hypocrites and apostates may have; and much less “the things which accompany salvation.” How many of you are there who have never “been enlightened, never tasted of the heavenly gift, never been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, never tasted of the good word of God, or the powers of the world to come^g.” Alas! beloved, what hope can ye enjoy? Your confidence is altogether delusive, and will deceive you to your eternal ruin. But, where these specious appearances have been found, there is in too many instances an entire lack of that gracious principle of which the text speaks. The love that has been exercised has been essentially defective in all its most distinguishing points: it has not been to the saints *as saints*, but on account of some accidental circumstance that has attended them: it has not been laborious and persevering, but has displayed itself only in easier services, and on more partial or particular occasions: and, above all, it has not originated altogether in love to God; or been exercised simply for the glory of his name. What then must be my persuasion respecting you? Must it not rather be, that, so far from possessing the things that accompany salvation, you have as yet “no part or lot in this matter; but are yet in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.” Beloved brethren, think of your danger ere it be too late; and beg of God that you may rest in nothing short of true conversion, and of that “hope which shall never make you ashamed.”]

2. What is my “*desire*” for you—

[Truly this accords with that of the Apostle Paul. On behalf of “every one of you,” I would desire, that you should shew all diligence in the exercise of this grace; and that you should continue in the exercise of it even “to the end:” like him also I would desire it with all earnestness^h.

I desire it, first, *on your own account*: for truly the exercise of love is a heaven upon earth. “Love is of God; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.” Look at the Christians that are full of doubts and fears;

^g ver. 4, 5.

^h ἐπιθυμοῦμεν.

and you will almost invariably find, that they are *comparatively* selfish, indolent, unprofitable servants, and greatly defective both in love to man and in zeal for God. On the other hand, look at the laborious and self-denying Christians, and you will find almost invariably that they are happy in their own souls, and happy in their prospects of the eternal world. For your own sakes therefore I would say, Live in the constant exercise of love, and spare no pains to honour God and to benefit his Church and people.

Next, I would desire it *for the Church's sake*. How happy must that Church be, where such is the employment of all its members! What peace, and love, and harmony will prevail among them! What mutual edification will be found in all their social intercourse! and with what joy will they go up together to the house of God! Nor will the odour of their graces refresh themselves only; it will be fragrant also in the nostrils of many who have never experienced any such emotions in their own souls, and will cause them to say, We will go with you; for we perceive that God is with you of a truth.

But, above all, I would desire it *for the Lord's sake*, that he may be glorified; for in comparison of this all other motives are weak and of no account^l. If it be true that "herein is the Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit," it must be most eminently true, when that fruit is such as is described in our text. Has the Lord Jesus Christ said, that "what we do unto the least of his Disciples, we do it unto him;" what delight must he not feel in a Church where all the members are vying with each other in the exercises of love? "When the spices of his garden thus flow out, our Beloved will surely come into it, and eat his pleasant fruits^k."

To all then of every description I say, "Walk in love: and, if ye have already begun this heavenly course, labour to abound more and more^l."]

ⁱ 2 Cor. ix. 11—14.

^k Cant. iv. 16.

^l If this be a *Charity Sermon*, the particular object of the Charity may here be stated; and if it be not to benefit *saints*, yet if it be to *make saints*, it will be no less pleasing in the sight of God.

MMCCXCHII.

EXHORTATION TO DILIGENCE.

Heb. vi. 12. *Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

IN the general course of God's providence, we perceive that blessings are dispensed in proportion to

men's exertions in the pursuit of them : and though the Disposer of all events sees fit, on some occasions, to vary his dispensations, loading the slothful with opulence, and suffering the industrious to be in want, yet for the most part we behold diligence rewarded, and indolence put to shame. In spiritual things none are disappointed ; labour is invariably attended with success : no one asks without receiving, or seeks without finding : God uniformly shews himself a rewarder of such as diligently seek him. "To him that studies to improve his talent, more is uniformly given ; and he is made to possess abundance." The experience of the saints in all ages fully corresponds with this. No one ever suffered loss, but in consequence of his own remissness : nor did ever any one devote himself unfeignedly to God, without receiving grace sufficient in the time of need. The author of this epistle confirms these observations : for, having spoken of those who apostatize from the truth, he tells the Hebrews, that he was persuaded better things of them, and things that accompany salvation ; for that they were active in every labour of love ; which was to him a convincing evidence of their conversion to God. He then takes occasion to exhort them all to use the same diligence ; and recommends them, if they would possess an assurance of hope, and enjoy it to the end, to press forward in the way which the patriarchal saints had trodden with such success. In his words we see,

What we must guard against in our Christian course,

I. A caution—

There is scarcely any evil more universally prevalent than spiritual sloth—

[In worldly concerns, sloth is often overcome by the force and influence of other propensities : the predominant affection of the mind, whatever it be, will often gain such an ascendancy, as to subdue the workings of less powerful corruptions : yea, to such a degree will interest or ambition lead us to mortify our love of ease, that we shall scarcely be sensible of the existence of sloth in our hearts. But, when once we turn our attention

to spiritual things, this evil disposition will discover itself, and prove, that notwithstanding it has hitherto been concealed from our view, it had taken deep root in our souls. In temporal things, our exertions are all on the side of nature. And, though we may feel some reluctance from contrary principles within us, we shall on the whole not find it so difficult to surmount their opposition. But, in spiritual things, we do not advance one step without conquering the united force of all our natural inclinations. Hence the evil, against which the Apostle cautions us, extends its empire over the whole world, and is to be resisted by every individual of mankind.]

As Christians, we have very abundant reason to mortify and subdue it—

1. It is repugnant to our duty—

[A life of godliness is represented as a race, and a warfare, in order to convey to us some idea of the activity and perseverance necessary for a right discharge of our duty. Do persons in a race find time to loiter? Have they their attention diverted by every trifle around them? Do they not press forward with unremitting ardour, and exert themselves the more as they approach the goal? Do they not bear in mind the prize, and strain every nerve to gain it? Look at those who are engaged in war, and arrived upon the field of battle; do they indulge security? Do they not watch the motions of the enemy, and animate one another to the combat, and endure almost insupportable fatigues, and expose themselves to the most imminent dangers, to defeat their enemies? If these then be fit images to represent the Christian's duty, what must we think of sloth? What propriety is there in these images, as applied to those who live regardless of eternity? Surely they rather form the strongest contrast to the whole life and conduct of such persons.]

2. It is inconsistent with our profession—

[Every one who calls himself a Christian *professes* to value his soul, to serve his God, to be seeking heaven. But what value has he for his soul, who prefers every vanity before it, and cannot be prevailed upon to seek its interests? What regard has he for God, who will not put forth all his powers to please and honour him? What desire after heaven has he, who will not renounce his sins, and fulfil his duties to secure it? And how absurd is it to call ourselves Christians, when the whole of our conduct so flagrantly contradicts our profession!]

3. It is subversive of our welfare—

[Let the effects of sloth be viewed in those, who, in the judgment of charity, are not altogether destitute of true

religion: how little victory have they over the world and their own corruptions, in comparison of what is attained by more diligent Christians! How little do they know of heavenly consolations! For the most part they are full of doubts and fears; and instead of enjoying that peace which passeth all understanding, they are harassed with the accusations of a guilty conscience. Their lamps being but seldom trimmed, they afford but a dim light to the world around them, and experience but little of the light of God's countenance in their souls. Moreover, at the close of their day, they frequently set as the sun behind a cloud; and instead of having "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of their Lord," they leave the world, uncertain whither they are going, and what shall be the issue of the future judgment. If we inquire into the cause of all this, we shall find it was sloth: they too often slumbered and slept, when they should have been watching unto prayer with all perseverance. If such then be the effects of sloth, where it gains only an *occasional* ascendancy, what must be the consequence of an *habitual* subjection to its dominion? Alas! its willing captives can expect nothing, but to perish under the wrath of an offended God^a.]

Having given us this salutary caution, the Apostle tells us,

II. What line we should pursue—

He proposes to our imitation the patriarchs and saints of old—

These are described as "inheriting the promises"—

[They had *not* indeed received the promised Messiah^b, having died long before he came into the world; but they had partaken in all the fruits and benefits, which he was in due time to purchase with his blood. When on earth, they, like minors, had enjoyed as much of the inheritance as had been judged proper for them; but now they were of full age, and had attained the full possession of *all* the promises: having been adopted into the family of God, and been begotten by his word and Spirit, they were heirs of God, and had God himself, together with all the glory of heaven, as their unalienable portion.]

The way by which they attained to this inheritance was "by faith and patience"—

[They had no claim whatever to it upon the ground of their own merit: they all looked to that "Lamb of God that

^a Matt. xxv. 26.

^b Heb. xi. 39.

was slain from the foundation of the world." They all lived and "died in faith." "To their faith they added patience." They, no doubt, as well as we, had "fightings without, and fears within;" and sustained many sore conflicts, both with the world around them, and with their own hearts. But they "ran their race with patience," and "endured unto the end."]

These therefore we should propose to ourselves as patterns.

We should imitate,

1. Their faith—

[If we begin not here, we can never stir one step in the way to heaven. We must "have like precious faith with them," renouncing all dependence on ourselves, and "making Christ our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption."]

2. Their patience—

["If we set ourselves to seek the Lord, we must prepare our hearts for temptation." Cain and Ishmael have their followers in every age. We must not be offended and turn aside on account of persecution, but must "possess our souls in patience." Nor must the love of this present world, or the difficulties of our spiritual warfare, be permitted to divert us from the path of duty: having "put our hand to the plough, we must never look back," "lest, having a promise left us of entering into God's rest, we should come short of it" at last.]

3. Their diligence—

[It is in this view more especially that we are called to follow them; "Be not slothful, but imitate them." Even those amongst them, who, like Moses and David, had a kingdom to govern, were yet exceeding diligent in every duty of religion, devoting themselves entirely to the service of their God. Let us then tread in their steps: let us "walk, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Let us "give all diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end;" and "whatever our hand findeth to do, let us do it with all our might."]

If any MOTIVES be wanting to enforce the Apostle's advice, consider further,

1. The effects of diligence in this life—

[The more earnest we are in serving God, the more will our hearts be comforted, our fellow-creatures benefited, and God glorified. Let us place ourselves more especially on a death-bed, and look back from thence, not with pride and self-complacency, but with gratitude and thanksgiving, on a life

devoted to God : and let us contrast our state with that of one who has never done any thing but treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, or one, who, though on the whole, pious, has filled his dying pillow with thorns by his remissness ; and surely we shall want no other motive to fight a good fight, and war a good warfare.]

2. The consequences of it in the world to come—

[There can be no doubt but that the greater our labour here, the richer will be our reward hereafter: and “one star will differ widely from another star in glory.” It is true, the most eminent saint might well be satisfied, and magnify the Divine goodness, if he be admitted to the lowest place in God’s kingdom: but if our capacity for happiness will be enlarged by all that we do for God, and every man will be filled according to his capacity, should we not be encouraged to exert ourselves? Should we not “forget what is behind, and reach forward unto that which is before?” Should we be contented to suffer loss *in* heaven, merely because we do not lose heaven altogether? “Let us look to ourselves then, that we lose not the things that we have wrought, but that we receive a *full* reward^d.”]

^c 1 Cor. iii. 15.

^d 2 John, ver. 8.

MMCCXCIV.

THE CITY OF REFUGE.

Heb. vi. 17, 18. *God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.*

THE multiplying of oaths is a dreadful snare to the consciences of men ; and a light method of administering and of taking them is amongst the most heinous of our national sins. But they run to a contrary extreme who affirm all oaths to be sinful: on many occasions they were prescribed to the Jews by God himself: the most eminent saints also, under the Christian dispensation, as well as under that of the Jews, have, on many occasions, appealed in the most solemn manner unto God. In the passage before us

God sanctions the use of oaths in concerns which are of great moment, and which cannot be settled in any other way. We are even assured that God himself has condescended to adopt this very method of confirming and establishing the minds of his people. From the Apostle's account of this astonishing transaction, we shall be led to consider,

I. The description here given us of God's people—

They are described by,

1. Their state—

[They once “were, like others, children of wrath^a,” but they have been regenerated by God's Spirit, and adopted into his family. “Being thus his sons, they are also heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ^b.” The promises, temporal, spiritual, eternal, are their inheritance. Hence they are justly called, “the heirs of promise.” To this happy state they have been brought in consequence of God's eternal counsels^c. But they have nevertheless attained to it in the use of means^d.]

2. Their conduct—

[Eternal life has been set before them in the Gospel; and Christ has been declared to be the only way in which that life can be found^e. This record they have believed: and, feeling their utter need of mercy, they have sought it in Christ^f. They have regarded him as *the city of refuge*, in which the man-slayer found protection from the avenger of blood; and have fled to him with holy earnestness as their only hope^g. In this way they have “laid hold” of God's promised mercy; and have attained to that state in which they may assuredly expect it.]

That these are the most highly favoured of all people will appear, if we consider,

II. The regard which God manifests towards them—

He wills that they should enjoy “strong consolation”—

[He would not that they should be held in doubtful suspense, or be harassed by fluctuations of hope and fear. He wishes rather that they should enjoy the privileges of their high station. Though they have in themselves much cause

^a Eph. ii. 3.

^b Rom. viii. 17.

^c 2 Tim. i. 9.

^d Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^e 1 John v. 11, 12.

^f Gal. ii. 16.

^g Numb. xxxv. 11, 12.

to fear, yet in HIM they have reason to exult and triumph. They should “know in whom they have believed, and that he is both able and willing to keep what they have committed to him^h.”]

In order to this he would have them persuaded of “the immutability of his counsel”—

[Nothing more contributes to the comfort of God’s people than a view of every thing as subjected to his unchanging will and irresistible controul. If only they learn to refer every thing to his overruling agency or righteous permission, all cause for disquietude will cease. Do the dispensations of his providence appear dark? the soul will be satisfied when it can say, This hath God doneⁱ. If events seem to contradict the promises, the reflection that God’s ways are unsearchable will silence every murmur, and dispose us to trust God, till he shall be pleased to unfold his purposes to our view^k — — — “Who shall separate me from the love of God?” is the triumphant challenge that will be given to all our enemies, as soon as ever we see God appointing every thing with immutable and unerring wisdom^l.]

For this purpose God confirms his promise with an oath—

[His promise could not be made more sure. But we are prone to unbelief. On this account he condescends to consult our weakness, and to swear by himself, that we may be the more firmly persuaded of his veracity. Even though God had not sworn, he never could have receded from his engagements, seeing “it is impossible for God to lie.” But his oath is calculated to satisfy the most fearful mind; and must convince us, beyond a possibility of doubt, that he will never leave us nor forsake us^m.]

INFER—

1. How astonishing is the condescension of God!

[That God should voluntarily lay himself under any obligations at all to us, may well excite our astonishment. But that he should so far indulge those who doubt his veracity, as to confirm his promises with an oath, with a view to their more abundant consolation and encouragement, is a condescension of which we could have formed no idea. In this He has cast a reflection, as it were, upon his own character, in order that

^h 2 Tim. i. 12.

ⁱ 1 Sam. iii. 18.

^k Heb. xi. 17—19. Abraham’s faith as described in these verses will admirably illustrate the subject.

^l Rom. viii. 33.

^m Heb. xiii. 5.

he might silence their unreasonable doubts. But he is God and not man, and therefore He could submit to such a degradation. O let all of us admire and adore him! And let us be careful that we "receive not this grace of God in vainⁿ."]

2. How great is the sin of unbelief!

[Unbelief says, in fact, not only that "it is possible for God to lie," but that He is indeed "a liar^o." How would such an indignity be borne by us, especially if we had never given the slightest occasion for it, but had fulfilled every promise that we had ever made? No doubt then God must be displeased whenever we cast such a reflection upon him. And if *now*, after that he has confirmed his promise with an oath, we disbelieve him, the affront will be aggravated in a tenfold degree, and our guilt be proportionably increased. Let us know then, that "not one jot or tittle of his word can fail;" and rest assured, that, if we trust in him, we shall never be confounded^p.]

3. How wide is the difference between God's people and the world at large!

[There may be but little *visible* difference between them: but they do differ very widely; nor is the difference the less real because it is invisible. The godly have fled for refuge to Christ as their only hope: they make the promises of God in Christ their boast, and their inheritance: and, while God regards them as his heirs, he fills them with a peace that passeth all understanding. But what hope have the careless and ungodly world? What consolation have they from the immutability of God? *All their comfort is founded on the hope that God may lie* — — Hence, instead of children and heirs of God, they are children of the wicked one, and inheritors of his portion. Let these awful truths sink deep into our minds. And "let us not be of those who turn back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of their souls^q."]

ⁿ 2 Cor. vi. 1.

^o 1 John v. 10.

^p Isai. xlv. 17.

^q Heb. x. 39.

MMCCXCV.

THE CHRISTIAN'S ANCHOR.

Heb. vi. 19, 20. *Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the vail; whither the Forerunner is for us entered.*

THIS life, we know, is but a passage to a better world; a wilderness state, leading to the heavenly

Canaan. In it we meet with trials, which are necessary for the exercise of our faith and patience : but in the midst of trials, we are favoured with consolations and supports, perfectly adequate to our necessities, and sufficient for our wants. The lives of Abraham and the patriarchs are very instructive to us, in this view. They had promises in abundance ; but did not actually possess the things promised. They were called to endure much, before their course was run ; and “through faith and patience they inherited the promises^a.” Thus are we also to “walk by faith, and not by sight ;” and “patiently to endure” our destined trials, in the assured expectation of “obtaining in due season the promised blessings^b.” In the mean time, like mariners, we have “an anchor” provided for us, which shall hold us fast amidst the storms and tempests with which we are assailed, and secure our ultimate arrival at the desired haven. This is declared in the words which we have just read ; and which will lead me to shew you,

I. What is “the anchor” here spoken of—

The universal voice of commentators has, together with our English version, determined it to be “*hope* ;” and from such an host it seems the greatest presumption to differ. Nor indeed would we be guilty of such presumption, if we could by any means acquiesce in the general sentiment. But the word “*hope*” is printed in italics, to shew that it is not in the original ; and, consequently, the only question is, What is the word which should have been supplied from the foregoing context ? or, What is the antecedent to which the relative in our text refers ? I will, with the diffidence that becomes me, state my view of this question : and leave every one to adopt, or reject, my alteration, as he shall see fit.

I will first, then, state my reasons why I think the word “*hope*” is not the word to be supplied.

The word “*hope*,” in the preceding context, must unquestionably mean the *object* of hope ; but in

^a ver. 12.

^b ver. 15.

the text it is put for the *grace* of hope: for it is something *within* ourselves which we have as “an anchor,” and which is to be cast by us on something that is *without*. But to use the *relative* in a sense so essentially different from that in which its *antecedent* is used, is a construction that should never be admitted, without an absolute and indispensable necessity.

If it be said, that in the text it may be used for the *object* of hope, I answer, that *it cannot* with any propriety; for it can scarcely be made sense. Moreover, if taken in that sense, it will be the same as the Forerunner, who is said to have entered where that is.

The true antecedent, I conceive, and consequently the proper word to have been inserted, is, the word “*consolation*,” and this will appear from a minute consideration of the context. It is true, the word “*hope*” occurs in the last member of the preceding sentence, whilst the word “*consolation*” is more remote; but the member of the sentence immediately preceding the text is nothing but a periphrasis for “*WE*,” or a description of the persons spoken of; and if the word “*WE*” be taken without that particular description annexed to it, the connexion between the relative and antecedent will be perfectly clear: “God has confirmed his promise with an oath, *that we might have strong consolation*; which *consolation* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.” The remarkable parallelism also between the words—a parallelism sufficiently observable in the translation, but still more marked in the original—renders this construction yet more obvious. God designed “that we *should* HAVE consolation; which consolation WE HAVE:” he designed that we should have STRONG consolation; and strong it is, even an “anchor of the soul, both SURE and STEADFAST.” Thus, to say the least, there is nothing *forced* in this construction; but, on the contrary, it is plain and simple, and such

^c ἰσχυράν παράκλησιν ἔχωμεν, ἣν ὡς ἄγκυραν ἔχομεν ἀσφαλῆ τε καὶ βεβηαίαν.

as could not possibly have been avoided, if that member, which is a mere periphrasis, or description of the persons possessing that consolation, had not intervened.

But can “consolation” properly be called “an anchor of the soul?” Most assuredly it may: for where consolation is wanting, the soul is liable to be tempest-tost, and driven to and fro by every wind of temptation; but where consolation abounds, there the soul is kept firm and immoveable; agreeably to what God himself has said, “The joy of the Lord is our strength^d.” And hence St. Paul unites the two, in his prayer for the Thessalonian converts: “Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath *given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work^e.*”

I say then, that the word “*consolation*” should, if my view of it be right, have been here supplied; even the consolation arising from a view of “the immutability of God’s counsels,” which are made over to us in express promises, and confirmed to us with an oath: it is this consolation, I say, which is indeed “the anchor of the soul” spoken of in our text. And it is remarkable, that in other parts of this same epistle, the Apostle speaks of his consolation in precisely the same view: “We,” says he, “are Christ’s house, if we hold fast the *confidence*, and the *rejoicing* of the hope, *firm* unto the end:” and again; “We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our *confidence* steadfast unto the end^f:” and again; “Cast not away your *confidence*, which hath great recompence of reward^g.”

That “*hope*” may be fitly represented as an anchor, there can be no doubt; but the doubt is, what is the anchor here spoken of: and THAT, I say again, is the consolation arising from an assured confidence in the promise and oath of an unchanging God.

^d Neh. viii. 10.

^e 2 Thess. ii. 16, 17.

^f Heb. iii. 6, 14. βεβαίαν κατέσχωμεν, in both places.

^g Heb. x. 35.

Let us now proceed to consider,

II. On what ground it must be cast—

It is said to “enter into that within the veil.” Other anchors descend into the deep: this ascends to the highest heavens, and lays hold on the very throne of God.

We might here speak of the things which were within the veil; as the *mercy-seat*, on which abode the bright cloud, the Shechinah, the symbol of the Deity; and the *ark*, which contained the law, and which was covered by the mercy-seat: and we might shew how this anchor of the soul fixes on them, even on a reconciled God and Father, and on the Lord Jesus Christ, who has fulfilled the law for us. But it will be better to adhere more simply to the preceding context, and to speak of the anchor as fixing on the immutability of a promise-keeping God. *This* is a proper foundation for it to rest upon: nor can we by any means lay too fast hold upon it. For, God has from all eternity entered into covenant with his only-begotten Son; engaging, if he would assume our nature, and “make his soul an offering for sin, he should see a seed who should prolong their days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hand^h.” To this the Son consented: and, having taken our nature upon him, he has fulfilled every part of his engagement; never ceasing from his work till he could say, “It is finished.” Now, will the Father recede from his engagements? Assuredly not: for “He is not a man, that he should lie; or the son of man, that he should repentⁱ.” Having confirmed “his promise with an oath, it is impossible for him to lie;” since “both the one and the other are absolutely immutable^k.” On this covenant, then, we may lay hold; and on it we may rest, as “ordered in all things, and sure^l.” In it, every thing is provided for us that we can stand in need of, whether for time or for eternity: it engages to impart to every one that

^h Isai. liii. 10.

^k ver. 18.

ⁱ Numb. xxiii. 19.

^l 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

has been given to Christ, pardon and peace, and holiness and glory.

On nothing short of this must our anchor fix. It must rest on nothing that is in *us*; no frames, no feelings, no experiences, no attainments. From God's covenant all our hopes flow; and on that must they all rest. We, alas! are changeable; and on *us* can no confidence be placed: but God is unchangeable, in all his *purposes*, which are unalterably fixed, "according to the counsel of his own will^m;" in all "his *promises*, which are all yea, and amen, in Christ Jesusⁿ;" and in all his *gifts*, for "his gifts and calling are without repentance^o." This is a foundation which will hold us fast; as it is said, "The foundation of God standeth sure; the Lord knoweth them that are his^p."

But, as this anchor is said to be sure and steadfast, it will be proper for me to shew,

III. From whence it derives its power and tenacity—

In order that a tempest-tossed vessel may be preserved in safety, it is necessary that the anchor itself should be of a good quality, and that the anchorage should be firm. And both these are requisite for the establishing of the soul: the "consolation" must be, not like "that of the hypocrite, which is but for a moment^q;" or that of the novice, which will give way on the very first assault of temptation^r: it must be far more solid; but it must be formed in us by God, even by the Holy Ghost, the Comforter: and it must lay hold on God himself, and derive all its efficacy from him.

But still, it is not from the strength of the anchor that our stability will be derived; but from the Lord Jesus Christ, who will render it effectual for its desired end.

It is not obvious, at first sight, why the Forerunner should be mentioned: for what has Jesus, as our Forerunner, to do with our anchor entering within the vail? But, on a closer inspection, it will be

^m Eph. i. 11.

ⁿ 2 Cor. i. 20.

^o Rom. xi. 29.

^p 2 Tim. ii. 19.

^q Job xx. 5.

^r Matt. xiii. 20, 21.

found, that though there is an apparent change in the figure, there is a perfect unity in the subject; the whole power and tenacity of our anchor being derived from *Him*, who is entered into the very place where that anchor is cast: for it is by means of the very same anchor that he himself has entered there, even as all the saints before him did^s: and he is entered there expressly "*for us*," that he may secure to us the very same issue as he himself has attained.

Let us enter a little more distinctly into this. I say, that it was by means of the very same anchor that Jesus himself rode out the storms with which he was assailed, and is now at rest in the desired haven. See him in the midst of all his storms: hear his reply to the most powerful of all his adversaries: "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above^t." Here his perfect confidence in an unchanging God is the manifest source of his stability. But to see this anchor in full operation, mark it as described by the Prophet Isaiah: "The Lord God will help me: therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint; and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me: who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me: who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old, as doth a garment: the moth shall eat them up^u." And was this an empty boast? No: this anchor held him fast, through all the storms that earth and hell could raise against him; as St. Paul informs us, saying, that "for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, and despised the shame, and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God^x."

It may still however be asked, what are his triumphs to *us*? I answer, He is not entered within the vail for himself only, but "*for us*;" that he may "appear in the presence of God for us^y," and secure

^s Heb. xi. 10, 14, 16, 26, 35.

^t John xix. 11.

^u Isai. l. 7—9.

^x Heb. xii. 2.

^y Heb. ix. 24.

to us the same blessed rest which he himself has attained. Whilst we are casting our anchor within the vail, he, by his grace, enables us to do it, and keeps the anchor itself from losing its hold. And, whilst we are confiding in the promises of God, and pleading them at a throne of grace, he is pleading for us, as our Advocate, before the throne of glory: he is pleading the covenant which the Father has made with him, in behalf of all the members of his mystical body. Thus is he there engaged, on God's part, as it were, to afford us all needful support; and on our part, to remind the Father of his engagements, and to see them all fulfilled.

But there is yet a further connexion between these things, which must by no means be overlooked. The Lord Jesus is entered into heaven, not as our Advocate merely, but as our Head and Representative: so that we may be not unfitly said to be already "sitting with him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus^z." We are one with him, as our federal head^a; yea, we are one with him also by a vital union, as members of his body^b: we are even "one spirit with him^c:" "our life is hid with Christ in God:" he is "our very life" itself: and hence it is that neither earth nor hell can ever prevail against us; according as it is written, "Our life is hid with Christ in God; and therefore when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory^d."

Now this subject may well SHEW us,

1. What is the proper and legitimate use of the deeper doctrines of our holy religion.

Whilst, by some, the doctrines of predestination and election are made for the display of their controversial skill, and are brought forward on all occasions as if they were the very milk of the Gospel, fit indiscriminately for the contemplation of all; to others, the very mention of the words sounds almost as blasphemy. But these doctrines are true, and capable of

^z Eph. ii. 6.

^a 1 Cor. xv. 22.

^b John xv. 1, 2.

^c 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^d Col. iii. 3, 4.

the most valuable improvement ; though, if entered upon with an unhallowed and contentious spirit, they may prove as injurious as they are to the humble mind truly beneficial. “The godly consideration of them,” as our Seventeenth Article states, “is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons ; as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation, to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God : but, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God’s predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust them, either into desperation, or into wretchlessness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation.” The true use of them, is to compose the mind with a humble affiance in God, as unbounded in mercy and unchangeable in his promises. They lead us to refer every mercy to God, as “the Author,” and to look to him for the continuance of it, as “the Finisher,” of our salvation^e. A just view of these doctrines, at the same time that it teaches to put away all carnal hopes, tends to raise us also above carnal fears. It shews us, that, in the whole work of man’s salvation, the creature is nothing, and God is ALL : it furnishes us with a consolation which nothing can destroy, and with a strength which nothing can overcome. In a word, it is “an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.” It is quite a mistake to imagine that the possession of this anchor supersedes the necessity of care on our part : we must be as diligent in the use both of the chart and compass, as if we had no such means of safety on board. It will never justify us in running needlessly amidst rocks and quicksands ; nor do we ever find such an use made of it amongst the saints of God. Its use is, to keep us steadfast in a time of need : and, if improved to that end, it will be found of incalculable advantage to the believing soul.

^e Heb. xii. 2.

2. The advantage which the Christian has over all other people upon earth—

A man that knows not God as a merciful and unchanging God, knows not where to look in a time of trial. He may, indeed, comfort himself with some general notions of God's mercy ; but he has no solid ground of hope ; nor can he ever know what is meant by " the peace of God which passeth all understanding." But the truly enlightened Christian can glory in the midst of tribulations : for he refers all to God, who is too wise to err, too mighty to be foiled, too faithful to forsake his people : he views God as presiding in every storm, and as " ordering all things for the good of his own people^f. He regards not the various circumstances which occur, as though they were accidental : whatever their aspect be, he considers them as parts of one great whole ; and, whether the steps which he is constrained to take in this wilderness appear, *in the eye of sense*, to be progressive or retrograde, he still bears in mind, that they are leading him " *in the right way*," to the city of habitation, the heavenly Jerusalem^g. Behold this illustrated in the Apostle Paul. What storms and tempests *he* had to sustain, you well know : but was he appalled by them ? No : " he knew in whom he had believed ; and that He was able to keep that which he had committed to him^h." " Who," says he, " is he that condemneth ? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again ; who *is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us*. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword ? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long ; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be

^f Rom. viii. 28.

^g Ps. cvii. 7.

^h 2 Tim. i. 12.

able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lordⁱ." Here you see the anchor in the full discharge of its office; and here you behold a stability which no created power could impart. This shews the Christian in his true light. I pray God we may all have an ever-increasing measure of that confidence in God which so mightily upheld his soul; and that we may thus be "*kept in safety for that inheritance, which we know to be reserved in heaven for us^k.*"

ⁱ Rom. viii. 34—39.

^k 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.

MMCCXCVI.

MELCHIZEDEC A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Heb. vii. 1—3. *For this Melchizedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.*

THE principal scope of the Epistle to the Hebrews is, to shew the superiority of Christ above the ordinances, and dispensers, of the Levitical law. In prosecuting this argument the inspired writer frequently mentions a priesthood different from that of Aaron, a priesthood instituted by God before any one of Abraham's chosen descendants was born, and consequently intended for the benefit of the Gentile world; and he shews that Christ was, according to an express prediction, and a most solemn oath, to be a priest of this higher order, the order of Melchizedec^a.

The words of the text should properly be connected with chap. v. 10. the whole intervening part being, as it were, a parenthesis. The Apostle, having laid great stress upon this prediction, now proceeds

^a Ps. cx. 4. with Heb. v. 6, 10. and vi. 20. and vii. 17, 21.

to illustrate it. He recites, in few words, the history to which the prediction itself refers, and declares, that it was altogether typical of Christ^b. The agreement between Melchizedec and Christ may be observed in two particulars :

I. The dignity of their persons—

Melchizedec, in reference to the import of his name, and the name of the city over which he presided, was called, king of righteousness, and king of peace: but in an infinitely higher degree do these titles belong to Christ—

[Christ is a king, not only over one city or country, but over the whole world; “his kingdom ruleth over all;” “he has the utmost ends of the earth for his possession;” he is “King of kings, and Lord of lords.” In his own person he is holy, harmless, separate from sinners; “he loveth righteousness, and hateth iniquity;” he is indeed “the Holy One, and the Just.” His laws are a perfect transcript of his mind and will, all holy, and just, and good. In his government he exercises the most perfect equity, not oppressing or despising any, but ever ready to afford protection, and succour, to all that call upon him. The very ends for which he administers his government, are altogether worthy of his divine majesty; he rules his people, only that he may transform them all into his own image, and make them “partakers of his own holiness.” In every view, he approves himself worthy of that august title which the voice of inspiration assigns him, “The Lord our Righteousness^c.” But Jesus is also called, “The Prince of peace^d,” nor is this without reason, since he reconciles us to an offended God, and makes peace for us by the blood of his cross: yea, he brings peace into the wounded conscience; and calms the tempests which were wont to agitate the soul — — —]

That typical king is also called a “priest of the Most High God;” yet, though glorious in this respect, he was only a shadow of Jesus, our great High-priest—

[Melchizedec, though a king, was not ashamed to execute the priestly office. Whether the bread and wine, which he provided for the refreshment of Abraham’s troops, had any mystical signification, we pretend not to say: but certainly he acted as a priest, when he blessed Abraham; and was

^b Gen. xiv. 14—20.

^c Jer. xxiii. 6.

^d Isai. ix. 6.

regarded as a priest by Abraham, who presented to him the tenth of all his spoils. As for Jesus, there was not any part of the priestly office which he did not perform. He was not indeed of that tribe to which the priesthood belonged, and therefore he was not instituted "according to the law of a carnal commandment;" but he was appointed of God with a solemn oath; and anointed to his office with a superabundant measure of the oil of gladness^c. Having, in order that he might have somewhat to offer, taken upon him our nature, he "presented himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." And having shed his own blood, he is gone with it within the vail, and there carries on the work of intercession for us; and will soon come forth again, not like the Jewish high-priest, to bless one nation only, but, like Melchizedec, to bless the father of the faithful, together with all his children dispersed throughout the world.]

Thus both in their *names* and *offices* is there a very striking agreement between Melchizedec and Christ. But the parallel between them may be yet further noticed in,

II. The duration of their priesthood—

We are altogether indebted to the revelation of God for a just construction of what was *related* respecting Melchizedec, and of what was *intentionally omitted* in his history—

[Melchizedec, like other men, was doubtless born of human parents, and in due season cut off by death from this present state of existence. But there is no mention made of his birth, or parentage, or death: nothing is said of any predecessor, whom he followed in his office, or of any successor to whom he resigned his office. These omissions, which might have been well accounted for from the brevity of that part of the Mosaic history, we are assured were ordered of God, on purpose that, by appearing "not to have beginning of days or end of life," he might, as far as a mortal man could do, shadow forth the eternity of Christ's priesthood.]

What was figurately ascribed to him, is literally true with respect to Christ—

[Christ, though born after the world had stood four thousand years, was appointed to this office from all eternity; and actually executed it, by his representatives at least, from the first moment that Adam or Abel offered their sacrifices on the

^c Ps. xlv. 7.

altar. Nor has he ceased from his priestly work: he is now within the vail, offering up the incense of his own prevailing intercession, while his people continue praying without. Nor will he desist from his labour as long as there shall continue one single soul, for whom to intercede before God. As he had none to precede him in his office, so will he have none to follow him: "He abideth a priest continually, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever^f."]

ADVICE—

1. Regard the Lord Jesus according to his real dignity—

[Jesus unites in himself the kingly and priestly character. None of the Levitical kings or priests ever attained to this honour. Uzziah, presuming to exercise the priestly office, was smitten with a leprosy, and made a monument of the Divine displeasure to the latest hour of his life^g. But Jesus, as was foretold concerning him, was, like Melchizedec, "a priest upon his throne^h." Let us view this combination of character with lively gratitude. Let us contemplate him as every way qualified to be a Saviour to us — — — And let us beg that he will exalt us also to "a royal priesthood, that we may offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through himⁱ."]

2. Look to him for the blessings which he is authorized to bestow—

[As our exalted head "he is a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins." "He has received gifts even for the most rebellious:" and, having given himself for us, he is fully authorized to bestow upon us the purchase of his blood. Shall we not then make our application to him? What "bread and what wine" would he not bestow on us for the refreshment of our weary souls! Shall we not then "open our mouths wide that he may fill them?" Surely, "if we be straitened, it is not in him, but in ourselves:" he would "satisfy the hungry with good things;" he would "fill us with all the fulness of God." O that that "God, who raised him up from the dead, would now send him to bless us, in turning every one of us from our iniquities^k!"]

3. Consecrate to him, not the tenth only of your spoils, but all that you possess—

[Though we should "honour him with our substance, and with the first-fruits of all our increase," yet that is by no means

^f Heb. vii. 23—25, 28. and xiii. 8.

^g 2 Chron. xxvi. 16—21.

^h Zech. vi. 13.

ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 5, 9.

^k Acts iii. 26.

sufficient: we should dedicate to him all that we possess in mind, or body, or estate. We are not indeed called to dispose of all our goods in charity, but to ascribe to his bounty every thing we possess, and “whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do it all to his glory.” Have we overtaken as Abraham did, and destroyed, our *spiritual* enemies? Let us acknowledge that “his was the power, and the glory, and the victory.” Let us see him in all things, and glorify him for all things; and “present to him both our bodies and our souls a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service¹.”]

¹ Rom. xii. 1.

MMCCXCVII.

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE CHRISTIAN ABOVE THE MOSAIC DISPENSATION.

Heb. vii. 19. *The law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.*

THAT the Jewish religion is superseded by the Christian, is well known: but, why it is superseded, and what relation the two have to each other, is not so generally considered.

The true light in which the law is to be considered, is this; it was “a shadow of the things which were to be more fully revealed by the Gospel,” or a scaffolding erected for a season for the purpose of constructing the edifice of Christianity, and to be removed of course as of no further use, when that building should be complete. It is in this view that the Apostle speaks of it in the passage before us. He has shewn that, while the law was yet in the summit of its glory, David foretold, that a priesthood, of an order totally different from that established by Moses, should be introduced; and that consequently all the rites and ceremonies connected with the Levitical priesthood should be done away. The reason that he assigns for this is, that the legal economy was “weak and unprofitable.” Not that it was so *in that particular view in which it was designed of God*; but that it was so *as far as related to those ends which the*

Jews, through the ignorance of its nature, *expected to be answered by it*. As a scaffolding is of use for the building of a house, but most unprofitable if resorted to as a residence instead of the house, so the law was good, as a typical exhibition of the way of salvation, but weak and unprofitable to those who should expect salvation by it. Salvation was, from the beginning, intended to be, and could be, by the Gospel only: “for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh to God.”

It is our intention to mark,

I. The difference between the Mosaic and the Christian dispensation—

By “the law,” the whole dispensation of Moses was meant; and, by “the introduction of a better hope,” the dispensation of Christ; which alone affords a solid ground of hope to sinful men. The things which the law could not effect, the Gospel does: it gives us,

1. Perfect reconciliation with God—

[The sacrifices which were offered under the law could never take away sin. There was nothing in them that was at all suited to this end. What was there in the blood of a beast to make satisfaction to Divine justice for the sin of man? The Apostle truly says, it was not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin^a.

But the Gospel points us to an atonement which was of infinite value, even the blood of God’s co-equal, co-eternal Son. This might well satisfy even for the sins of the whole world; because more honour was done to the Divine law by *His* performing its commands and suffering its penalties, than could have been done by the obedience or suffering of the whole human race. Hence the Scriptures invariably represent the Father as “reconciled to the world by the death of his Son;” and as requiring nothing more of us, than to come to him in the name of his Son, pleading the merits of his blood, and relying wholly on his atoning sacrifice. To all such persons he says, that, “though their sins may have been as crimson, they shall be as white as snow,” and that they not only *shall be*, but actually *are*, from the first moment of their believing, “justified

^a Heb. x. 4.

from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses^b." In this view the Gospel is called "the ministry of reconciliation:" and the one message which all the ministers of the Gospel have to declare, is, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them^c."]

2. Perfect peace of conscience—

[The annual repetition of the same sacrifices under the Mosaic dispensation shewed, that the sins for which they were offered were not yet fully pardoned. Hence they were rather "remembrances of sins" than actual means of forgiveness: and consequently "they could not make men perfect as pertaining to the conscience^d."

But the atoning "blood of Christ really cleanses from all sin." It "purges *the conscience*^e;" so that, being justified by it, "we have peace with God," and in our souls "a peace which passeth all understanding." "In fleeing to Christ for refuge, and laying hold on that hope that is set before us, we have strong consolation." Divine justice being satisfied, we are satisfied also. "We know in whom we have believed, and are assured that he is able to keep that which we have committed to him." According to his promise, "he keeps our minds in perfect peace, because we trust in him:" he fills us with "peace and joy in believing," yea, "with joy unspeakable and full of glory."]

3. Perfect holiness of heart and life—

[The law commanded, but gave no strength for obedience. But Christ procured for his followers the gift of the Holy Spirit, "by whose effectual aid we can do all things" that are required of us. *Absolute* perfection indeed is not to be expected in this life: for even St. Paul, after having ministered in the Gospel for twenty years, said of himself, "I have not yet attained, neither am I already perfect:" but *evangelical* perfection, which consists in an unreserved surrender of our whole souls to God, we may, and must attain. For this purpose are "the Scriptures given, that by them the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works^f." For this purpose are the promises in particular revealed, that "by them we may cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God^g." Nor is holiness merely provided for us; it is actually *secured* to us by the Gospel: "Sin shall not have dominion over us,

^b Acts xiii. 39.

^d Heb. ix. 9, 10, and x. 1—3.

^f 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

^c 2 Cor. v. 18, 19.

^e Heb. ix. 14.

^g 2 Cor. vii. 1.

because we are not under the law, but under grace:" on the contrary, we shall be made "new creatures," and "be renewed after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness." This is "that thing which the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh; and which God, sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, as a sacrifice for sin, has done; he has so condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law shall be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit^h."]

Corresponding with this difference is,

II. The distinguishing benefit which under our dispensation we enjoy—

The access to God which Christians possess, results entirely from the nature of the dispensation under which they live: and the Apostle, in speaking of it, includes two things:

1. The liberty which we have of drawing nigh to God—

[The whole of the Jewish ritual tended rather to keep men at an awful distance from God than to bring them near to him. There was one court for the priests, into which they alone had admittance: and into the holy of holies none but the high-priest could enter! and he only on one day in the year; and then only according to certain forms that were prescribed. By these restrictions "the Holy Ghost signified, that the way into the holy place was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was yet standingⁱ." Had any one presumed to violate this law, he would have instantly been visited, if not with a fatal stroke, at least (as King Uzziah was) with some awful calamity.

But for us there is "a new and living way opened, through the vail^k," which was rent in twain from the top to the bottom at the very moment of our Saviour's death. And, as by Christ "we have access unto the Father," so we are told to "come with boldness into the holiest by his blood." The golden sceptre is held out to every one of us, so that we may "come boldly to the throne of grace," assured of obtaining mercy, and of "finding grace to help us in the time of need" — — —]

2. The delight which we have in the exercise of that liberty—

[The approaches of persons to God under the law were full of burthensome ceremonies: those under the Gospel are intimate and delightful. "God draws nigh to us, whilst we draw

^h Rom. viii. 3, 4.

ⁱ Heb. ix. 8.

^k Heb. x. 20—22.

nigh to Him." On those occasions, "he manifests himself unto us as he does not unto the world:" he "lifts up the light of his countenance upon us," and "sheds abroad his love in our hearts." Hence the Christian accounts prayer not so much a duty as a privilege: he says with the beloved Apostle, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" — — —

This arises entirely out of the nature of our dispensation, which is justly called, "the perfect law of liberty." It presents to our view our great High-priest entered for us within the vail, and "ever living to make intercession for us." And, "having such an High-priest, we draw nigh unto God with full assurance of faith." Nor does he take less pleasure in communing with us, than we with him; for "the prayer of the upright is his delight."]]

LEARN from hence the true reason why the generality of Christians differ so little from the Jews or heathens—

[They understand not the nature of the dispensation under which they live; and therefore they get no material good from their religion: they are not made *holy* by it, nor are they made *happy*: they think that an assured sense of our acceptance with God is unattainable; and that communion with Him is an enthusiastic dream. They regard Christianity as little else than a milder publication of the law; reducing the demands of the law to the present ability of man, and making ample allowances for man's infirmity. They view it as a system of duties, rather than of privileges; and they expect more from their partial obedience to its precepts, than from a humble affiance in its promises. What wonder then if, when when they so assimilate the Gospel to the law, they experience no more benefit from it than the law conveyed? What wonder, I say, if they never be made perfect by such a religion as theirs? Would we attain to perfect love, and perfect peace, and perfect holiness, we must look more to the atoning blood of Christ, and to the sanctifying influences of his Spirit. In the former, we shall find all that we need for our reconciliation with God; and in the latter, all that we need for our restoration to his image. The Gospel, mutilated and debased by unbelief, will bring us neither present nor eternal happiness: but if embraced, as it ought to be, with unmixed, unshaken confidence, it will prove "the power of God to the salvation of our souls."]]

MMCCXCVIII.

CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD, AND ABILITY TO SAVE.

Heb. vii. 25. *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

THE Mosaic economy was never intended to be either universal or perpetual; not universal, because many of the principal rites prescribed by it could never be performed by those who were far distant from Judæa; nor perpetual, because, whilst it was yet in all its force and grandeur, its dissolution, and the establishment of a better in its stead, were expressly and frequently foretold. The appointment of another priesthood to supersede that of Aaron, was of itself, as the Apostle teaches us, sufficient to prove, that the abolition of the Aaronic priesthood and of the whole Levitical law was to take place, as soon as that better priesthood after the order of Melchizedec should be established.

The shew wherein that priesthood was superior, is the great scope of the chapter before us. But it is to one particular only that we shall confine our attention at this time; and that is, the continuance of it in one person, whilst the Aaronic priests were removed by death, and constrained to transmit their office to a successor.

We notice then,

I. The perpetuity of Christ's priesthood—

“The priests under the law were many, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but this man, the Lord Jesus Christ, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.” “He ever liveth to make intercession for us.”

[When in a vision he revealed himself to John, he said, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore^a.” “He was indeed crucified through weakness;

^a Rev. i. 18.

but yet he liveth by the power of God^b:" and "being raised from the dead, he dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him^c." Nor is it merely in a state of rest, that he liveth; but for the purpose of carrying on his priestly office in our behalf. The high-priest under the law, when he had offered the sacrifice upon the altar, carried the blood within the vail into the holy of the holies, there to sprinkle it before, and on the mercy-seat, and to offer incense in the more immediate presence of his God. This is the very thing which Jesus now lives to effect. Having offered himself a sacrifice upon the cross, he is now gone with his own blood into heaven itself, there to exhibit it as a memorial before God, and as the ground of all his intercessions. In his Father's presence he pleads it for us as a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, and as the price paid for all those blessings which his people stand in need of for their full and complete salvation. True it is, that he has entered into heaven, to take possession of that glory which by the covenant-engagements entered into by the Father was to be conferred on his human nature: but yet, it was not for his own glory only that he ascended thither, but for our good; that he might carry on and perfect in our behalf the work he had undertaken for us. *Only let us contemplate the ends for which the high-priest on the great day of atonement entered into the holy of holies; and we shall have a distinct, and accurate, and perfect view of the ends for which our blessed Saviour is gone into heaven, and of the work which he is there living to accomplish*^d — — —]

But without further dwelling on so clear a point, let us proceed to notice,

II. The consolatory truth resulting from it—

As the continual changing of the priests under the Mosaic dispensation shewed the weakness and unprofitableness of their ministrations; so the unchanging continuance of Christ's priesthood shews that "he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him." Here observe,

1. What is taken for granted—

^b 2 Cor. xiii. 4.

^c Rom. vi. 9.

^d Here a distinct view may be taken of the pleas founded upon his sacrifice, as having been appointed of the Father for certain ends, and offered by the Son in the full confidence of its being accepted of the Father, and of its prevailing for all who trust in it.

[It is taken for granted that all his people "come unto God through him." If it be asked, What is meant by coming to God through him? the answer is plain: Look unto the Aaronic priests and their ministrations, and there you shall find a perfect representation of what is experienced by the people of God in all ages. When the high-priest entered within the vail, there was but one sentiment pervading all the worshippers in every part of the temple: all considered him as their mediator and intercessor with God. They knew that of themselves they were incapable of drawing nigh to God: but regarding the high-priest as their head and representative, they considered themselves as approaching God in and through him. They had no hope whatever but in the blood of the sacrifice which he carried within the vail, and in the incense which he offered there. Amongst all the people of the Jews there would not be any diversity of sentiment on this head. Thus it is that we also come unto God by Christ: we see him as going into heaven with his own blood which he has offered for us; and as presenting also the incense of his own prevailing intercession: and *in him as so occupied is all our hope*. Nor is this a mere theoretical sentiment in the Christian's mind, but a living and an abiding principle, by which he is actuated in all his approaches to the throne of grace: nor has he any hope whatever of finding acceptance with God, but by coming to him in this way.

But whilst this striking correspondence exists between the Jewish and Christian mode of approaching God, there is one remarkable point of difference, which must by no means be overlooked. The Jew, during the mediation of the high-priest, was kept at an awful distance, not daring to pass the limits that were assigned him: but the Christian has access into the secret of God's presence for himself, and may urge the very same pleas before God at the throne of grace, which his great high-priest is urging for him at the throne of glory. The pleas are the same, and the grounds of hope are the same, to each: but the superior liberty of the Christian marks the superiority of the priesthood which has procured it for him.]

2. What is plainly asserted—

[The Jewish high-priest, notwithstanding he presented all the sacrifices according to the prescribed form, could not prevail so as to obtain for the people a perfect and perpetual forgiveness: at the same period in the ensuing year he must present the same offerings again: which shewed, that a further expiation was necessary in order to a plenary remission of their sins. But our great High-priest has no occasion ever to renew his offering: nor will he ever devolve on another the office

which he executes. "He therefore is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him."

The words, "to the uttermost," imply two things; namely, that he can save *completely* and *for ever*. The conscience of a Jew was never perfectly liberated from a sense of guilt by the offerings which were made for him: but the Christian is brought into a state of perfect peace, "his conscience being purged from dead works to serve the living God." Nor does he feel a need of any thing more than that which he finds in the sacrifice of Christ. He looks forward to nothing to add to it, or to give it efficacy. Being once sprinkled with the blood of Christ, his soul is at rest; because he knows that Jesus by his one offering has perfected *for ever* them that are sanctified. The Jew found his sacrifices to be little else than remembrances of his sins: but the Christian knows that, by virtue of his sacrifice, "his sins and iniquities shall be remembered no more^e."]]

This subject, duly apprehended, is replete,

1. With instruction—

[If Christians were more in the habit of considering the Jewish law, they would gain a far clearer insight into the nature and principles of their own religion. Ask a Christian, How he is to be saved? and he will give you some vague and indistinct answer about God's mercy, and his own repentances and reformations. Even the priests themselves, who should instruct others, are not always clear on this matter. But no Jewish priest would have hesitated to point to the sacrifices as the only means of acceptance with God. Let us then learn from them, that, if we will ever come to God at all, it must be simply and solely by the Lord Jesus Christ: "He is the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by him^f." And let this especially be remembered, that there is no salvation for us in any other way: "for no other persons will the Lord Jesus intercede; nor shall his saving power be exerted for any others." This is clearly intimated in the text. Whom is it that he is able to save? it is "*them that come unto God by him*." And for whom is it that he intercedes? "He ever lives to make intercession *for them*." O that we might all consider this, and seek the Lord in the only way in which he ever can be found!]

2. With consolation—

[What an astonishing thought it is, that our adorable Emmanuel, now seated at the right hand of God, is living, as it were, only for us, to transact our business there, as once he

^e Heb. ix. 1—3, 11—18.

^f John xiv. 6.

transacted it here on earth. From heaven he came to offer a sacrifice for us; and to heaven is he gone again, to plead that sacrifice in our behalf. Christians do not sufficiently think of *a living* Saviour: they dwell with pleasure on the thoughts of *his death*, but scarcely advert to *the life* which he is now spending in their service above. But St. Paul teaches us to derive from this source more comfort and encouragement than any other;—not even the death of Christ itself being so rich a source of consolation as this^g — — — Reflect then on him in this view, as presenting his own blood before his Father in our behalf, and as asking for us a daily and hourly supply of all that we can stand in need of — — — Bear in mind, that you can be in no difficulty which he does not see; nor in any danger, from which he cannot save. And, as his care of you is perfect, so let your affiance in him be perfect also.]

3. With encouragement—

[What motive can any one have for an entire surrender of himself to God, like that which is here proposed to him? Does Jesus live altogether for us in heaven, and shall not we live altogether for him on earth? Is not this reasonable, and our bounden duty^h? — — — Dedicate, then, yourselves to him; and count no work too arduous to engage in for him, nor any sacrifice too great to make — — — It is but little that you can do for him, though your life were protracted to ever so great a length; but time is short and uncertain: therefore “Whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do it with all your mightⁱ.”]

^g Rom. v. 10. and viii. 34.

^h Rom. xii. 1.

ⁱ Eccl. ix. 10.

MMCCXCIX.

CHRIST, A SUITABLE HIGH-PRIEST.

Heb. vii. 26. *Such an High-priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.*

WITHOUT the Epistle to the Hebrews, we could never have understood the true scope of the Levitical law, much less its full accomplishment in the Lord Jesus Christ; we could never have ventured to trace such a correspondence between Melchizedec and Christ, or to lay such a stress on a variety of minute expressions in the prophetic writings as the Apostle

does. And though we might easily have maintained the truth of our holy religion as founded on miracles and prophecies, we never could have silenced an unbelieving Jew so easily, as by the help of this epistle we are enabled to do.

The Apostle is here tracing the superiority of Christ and his priesthood, to all the priests, and their services, under the Levitical law. And, in the words before us, he observes, that no person, but one endowed as Jesus was, would have been sufficient for the necessities of fallen man. In confirmation of this sentiment, I will shew,

I. What kind of an High-priest the Lord Jesus was—

He is here compared with the high-priests under the law. Now, they were sinful creatures, like ourselves^a: but of Jesus it is said,

He was perfectly “holy”—

[In his own nature, he was “holy;” in the whole of his conduct, he was “harmless;” and though in the midst of an ensnaring and polluting world, he was “undefiled:” in no one act, word, or thought, did he ever, in the smallest degree, violate the perfect law of God. “In him was no sin^b.”]

He was, in all respects, “separate from sinners”—

[*In his very birth* he was widely different from them: he came not into the world like other men: he derived not his human nature in a way of ordinary generation, but from the immediate hand of God. He was born of a pure virgin; and therefore, though born under the law, he was in no respect subject to the curse entailed on Adam’s posterity for the violation of it: nor did he inherit the taint and pollution which is, of necessity, transmitted to all who in a natural way descend from him.

In his life, too, he was separate from them: for though he sojourned amongst them, and was continually holding the most friendly intercourse with them, he never, in any degree, imbibed their spirit. He was as pure as the light itself, which is incapable of contamination from the things amongst which it shines.

In his death, also, he was altogether separate from them: for he voluntarily gave up his life; as he shewed, by speaking in a loud voice at the moment of surrendering up his soul to

^a Heb. v. 1—3.

^b 1 John iii. 5.

God^e: and he died also as a victim, an expiation for sin, even for the sins of the whole world^d.]

He was “higher than the heavens”—

[He was so *previous to his incarnation*. From all eternity was he “in the bosom of the Father^e,” and “had a glory with him before all worlds^f.” He was in a sense that the highest archangel never was, the Son of God, “his only-begotten Son^g,” whom “all the angels of heaven worshipped^h.” He was “the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his personⁱ.” And *subsequent to his death*, also, was he exalted “far above all principalities and powers, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come^k :” “for he rose again, and went into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him^l.”]

In all these respects he was widely different from all the priests under the Levitical law—

[They were “taken from amongst their brethren,” and “compassed with the same infirmities” as others; and “received honour from,” rather than conferred honour upon, the office they sustained; and could execute it only during a few short years of their existence upon earth^m. Had He in any of these respects resembled them, he would not have been a suitable High-priest for us.]

To elucidate this, I will proceed to shew,

II. Why “such an High-priest alone became us”—

Had the Lord Jesus been an imperfect being, like the high-priests of old,

1. He would have needed an offering for himself—

[*They* were forced to offer a sacrifice first for their own sins, before they could hope for any acceptance in what they should offer for the sins of othersⁿ. But this was unnecessary for Him, because there was no spot of sin found in him. And this is the very particular which the Apostle, in the words following my text, specifies, as resulting from His spotless character: “He needeth not daily, as those high-priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s.”]

^e Luke xxiii. 46. with John x. 17, 18.

^d Matt. xx. 28.

^e John i. 18.

^f John xvii. 24.

^g Heb. i. 5.

^h Heb. i. 6.

ⁱ Heb. i. 3.

^k Phil. ii. 9—11. Eph. i. 20, 21.

^l 1 Pet. iii. 22.

^m Heb. v. 1, 2, 4.

ⁿ Heb. v. 3.

Having not the slightest imperfection of *his own* to atone *for*, he could atone *for us*, and intercede with God *for us*.]

2. He would have had nothing that he could offer for us—

[He could not offer *slain beasts*, because he did not belong to the tribe to which this office was exclusively assigned. From the tribe of Judah he sprang: and “of that tribe nothing was said respecting priesthood^o.” The law would have inflicted death upon him, if he had attempted to interfere with the duties of the Aaronic priesthood. As for *his own body*, he could not offer that; seeing it would have been polluted: and the law required that every sacrifice should be “without spot or blemish.” The paschal lamb was set apart four days before it was offered, on purpose that it might be thoroughly examined, so as to be found free from *outward* blemish: and, after it was slain, it was flayed, and laid open; so that the *inwards* also might be inspected, and be found perfect. Now such an offering must our Lord present: but, if any imperfection cleaved to him, he could not. No such impediment, however, was found in him; so that he could offer himself to God, as “a Lamb without blemish and without spot^p.”]

3. He would not have corresponded with his type—

[He was to be “a Priest after the order of Melchizedec^q.” Now consider how great a man Melchizedec was: for even Abraham himself, and, in Abraham, all the Levitical priests also, offered tithes to him, confessing thereby their inferiority to him^r. But, if Jesus was a mere man, he was inferior to Abraham, who, as being “*the father*,” must be considered as *the head*, “of the faithful.” Being however such an one as we have before described, he was a worthy successor of Melchizedec. What Melchizedec was in a shadow, that was Jesus in reality, “King of righteousness, and King of peace; without father (as to his human nature), or mother (as to his divine), without descent (having no direct successor); having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, but abiding a Priest continually^s.”]

4. He would in no respect have answered to our necessities—

[*All perfection must be in him*, to enable him to atone for sin: and *all power must be in him*, to make that atonement effectual. Had either the one or the other been wanting, he

^o ver. 13, 14.

^p 1 Pet. i. 19.

^q ver. 15, 17, 21.

^r ver. 4—7.

^s ver. 1—3.

would not have been capable of fulfilling that high office: but, possessing all these requisites, he is accepted of the Father, and is “able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him^t.”]

IMPROVEMENT^u—

Learn, then, from hence,

1. What is the only means of acceptance with our God—

[Is there “a great High-priest over the house of God^x?” We must go to God through him. We must not attempt to approach God, except through this appointed Mediator. To think of looking for acceptance through any works of our own, or of uniting any works of ours with his meritorious sacrifice, would be folly in the extreme. Even when the blood of beasts only was presented in sacrifice, the offerer did not unite with it any thing of his own: how much less, then, can we add any thing to the sacrifice which our High-priest has offered! Let not the thought enter into your heart; or, if it enter, let it be discarded with abhorrence: for there is no High-priest, but he; no sacrifice, but his; no other name given under heaven, whereby any man can be saved, but the beloved, the honoured, the adored name of JESUS. “Look to *him*, and you shall be saved^y: look any where else, and you perish beyond a doubt.]

2. How blessed a thing it is to live under the Christian dispensation—

[Supposing a Jew were at this moment living at Jerusalem; and the temple were now standing, as richly furnished in every respect as in the days of Solomon. Suppose, too, that he had the cattle upon a thousand hills at his disposal; he could not offer unto God one acceptable sacrifice; because he could not find, upon the face of the whole earth, a Jew who could infallibly trace his pedigree to Aaron. If any other person should presume to officiate for him, in the place of the high-priest, he must instantly be put to death^z. Unhappy people! the only people upon the face of the whole earth, who are incapable of approaching God, in the way which they themselves think and believe to be right! But, Christians, blessed are ye; for you *have* an High-priest; and one, too,

^t ver. 25.

^u If this were the subject of an *Ordination* or *Visitation Sermon*, here would be an excellent opportunity for shewing what should be the character of the *Christian Priesthood*; and how *holy*, how *separate from the ungodly*, and how *superior to the things of time and sense*, every Christian Minister should be.

^x Heb. iii. 1.

^y Isai. xlv. 22.

^z Ezra ii. 62.

who is altogether suited to you, and sufficient for you. Rejoice in this; and know your privilege: and, "having such an High-priest over the house of God," avail yourselves of the opportunity afforded you, "drawing nigh to him with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having your hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and your bodies washed (as) with pure water: and hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering: for (all the promises of God are yours; and) He is faithful that "hath promised^a."]

^a Heb. x. 21—23.

MMCCC.

CHRIST THE MEDIATOR OF THE NEW COVENANT.

Heb. viii. 6. *Now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.*

THE use of the Mosaic law is by no means sufficiently appreciated in the Christian world. The value of a map to travellers, or of a chart to one who navigates the trackless deep, is well known: but when God has given to us a graphical exhibition (if I may so speak) of every part of our road to heaven, we never think of looking to it as the means of instruction to our souls. Yet one would think that, after the strict injunctions given to those who drew these maps, no one would be inattentive to them. The whole Mosaic law was intended to represent, in plain and visible characters, the way of life. Hence, when Moses received his instructions from God relative to the tabernacle and all its vessels, he was ordered to take the utmost care not to deviate from them in the smallest matter^a. Of this the Apostle takes notice in the words preceding our text: *Moses was admonished* of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for *see*, saith he, "That thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount." A similar direction was given to David also in reference to the temple which his son Solomon was to erect^b.

^a Exod. xxv. 40.

^b 1 Chron. xxviii. 19.

But whence arose this extreme need of accuracy? The whole plan of salvation was laid in the divine mind; and the tabernacle and temple, with their vessels and their services, were intended to shadow it forth: and the smallest deviation from the model would have led to mistaken apprehensions about the way to life: it would either have kept back from man something which God designed to execute, or taught him to expect something which it was not God's intention to perform. But, the law being a perfect model of the whole spiritual building, the Gospel-edifice in all things corresponds with it; and thus reciprocally receiving and reflecting light, they mutually illustrate each other, and prepare the mind for a most accurate perception of the great mystery of redemption.

The point of which the Apostle is here speaking, is, the superiority of Christ's priesthood to that of Aaron. Having dwelt upon it at some length, he recapitulates the subject, and gives as "the sum of" his observations, That Christ, our High-priest, is every way superior to the Levitical priests, since he is the Mediator of a better covenant, and, consequently, "has obtained a more excellent ministry than theirs."

To elucidate this important truth, I shall consider,

I. The covenant of which Christ was the Mediator—

It is spoken of in reference to another covenant to which it was superior. Let us inquire then,

1. What is that other covenant?

[It is an "old covenant, which vanisheth away^c." In the Holy Scriptures we read of three covenants; the Adamic, that is, the covenant of works; the Abrahamic, or covenant of grace; and the national covenant made by Israel, that was peculiar to them, and was not binding on any other people. Now it is not with the Adamic covenant that the Christian covenant is compared, because that never waxeth old nor vanisheth away: it is at this hour as much in force as ever; and all who continue under it, will be dealt with according to it, till they take refuge in the covenant of grace^d.

^c ver. 13.

^d Gal. iii. 10. and v. 3.

Neither is it the Abrahamic covenant with which the Christian covenant is compared; for they are, in fact, the same covenant, and differ only in the measure of light with which they are revealed. Nothing that is subsequent to the Abrahamic covenant has ever disannulled it^e: and consequently, inasmuch as it never vanisheth away, it cannot be the one to which the Christian covenant is here said to be superior.

It remains then that the covenant with which the Christian covenant is compared, is that which God entered into with the Israelites in the wilderness. This was of a mixed nature: it was, in part, a covenant of works; and, in part, a covenant of grace. In as far as it promised manifold blessings to sincere though imperfect obedience, it was a covenant of grace; but in as far as it suspended those blessings altogether upon the performance of those works, it was a covenant of works. The full account of this covenant is given by Moses in the twenty-fourth of Exodus^f — — — The Prophet Jeremiah contrasts it with that new covenant which God promised to make with his people under the Christian dispensation^g — — — and the Apostle, in the words following our text, expressly tells us, that it was of that covenant he spake, when he said it was inferior to the Christian covenant and superseded by it^h. But,]

2. Wherein was the Christian “covenant better” than it?

[It was so *in its own nature*, being incomparably more liberal in its terms, more rich in its provisions, more permanent in its duration. The Mosaic covenant (as I will call it) granted nothing but in a way of remuneration for services performed: the Christian covenant grants every thing upon the simple condition of our laying hold of the covenant, and asking for the blessing for Christ’s sake. The Mosaic covenant held forth only temporal benefits to those who were under it: but the Christian covenant imparts to the believer all the blessings both of grace and glory. The Mosaic covenant waxed old and vanished away: the Christian covenant will endure for ever and ever.

It was so also *in the promises with which it was established*. The possession of the promised land, with a long continuance of peace and plenty, was the chief promise of the Mosaic covenant. It is true, there were promises of pardon and acceptance through the offering of certain sacrifices: but the pardon did not bring peace unto the conscience; nor continue longer than till the next day of annual expiation; nor extend at all

^e Gal. iii. 17.

^f Compare Exod. xxiv. 3—8. with Heb. ix. 19—21.

^g Jer. xxxi. 31—34.

^h ver. 8, 9.

to sins of greater enormity, as adultery and murder. But the Christian covenant purges away all sense of guilt from the conscience, and brings into the soul a peace that passeth all understanding: it extends to every sin that man can commit; and assures the believer, that he shall in due time possess all the glory of heaven. There cannot be conceived any want that the believer can feel, or any circumstances under which he may feel it, but there are promises in the Christian covenant precisely suited to his situation, and commensurate with his necessities: and all are to be apprehended simply by faith. Even the repentance which is necessary to fit the soul for the reception of the blessings, and the faith that is to apprehend them, are comprehended within the promises: they are not required of us in order that other blessings may be bestowed *as a reward* for them; but they are promised to us, *as means of introducing the soul* to the possession of all other blessings. If we attempt to spin them, as it were, out of our own bowels, that we may be at rest in them, and make them a web whereby to catch other blessings, both they and we shall soon be swept away with the besom of destruction. But, if we go to God for them, then shall they be conferred upon us, and wrought in us by God as initiatory blessings, preparatory to the full bestowment of all the kingdom of heaven.

How much better then this covenant is than the Mosaic, must be obvious to the most superficial observer.

In order to a just understanding of the text, it will be proper yet further to inquire,]

3. In what sense is Christ "the Mediator of this better covenant?"

[Moses, in the first instance, and after him the Aaronic priests in succession, were the mediators of the old covenant. Every thing was transacted by, and through, them. They offered the sacrifices, and carried in the blood of them before God, and offered incense before God in behalf of the people; and then went forth from God to bless the people. So is the Lord Jesus Christ the Mediator of this better covenant. He is "the Daysman that lays his hand upon both partiesⁱ," and mediates between them. No man comes to God, but by him; nor does God vouchsafe his blessings to any man, but through him.]

This part of our subject will be more fully opened, whilst we mark,

II. The excellency of his priesthood as connected with it—

ⁱ Job ix. 33.

To set forth this is the chief scope and aim of the Apostle in the whole context. And, to illustrate his subject, he points out,

1. The superior dignity of his person—

[Christ is the true Melchizedec, the “King of righteousness and peace,” without father (as it respected his human nature), without mother (as to his divine nature); having neither beginning of days, nor end of life^k: “for from everlasting to everlasting he is God^l.” But the Aaronic priests were poor mortals like ourselves. Besides, the Aaronic priests were sinners, and needed first to offer for their own sins, and then for the people’s: but not so the Lord Jesus: “he knew no sin:” “he was without spot and blameless:” “he was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens,” even “the Son of God who is consecrated for evermore^m.”]

2. The transcendent excellency of his offering—

[The Mosaic priests offered nothing better than the blood of bulls and of goats: but the Lord Jesus offered his own immaculate body; yea, “he made his own soul an offering for sinⁿ.” True, it was the manhood only that suffered; but his manhood, having “the Godhead dwelling in it bodily^o,” was of more value than all the cattle upon a thousand hills: it was a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world^p.]

3. The glory of the place where he ministers—

[The tabernacle where the Mosaic priests officiated was glorious, as being consecrated to such a holy use: but, glorious as it was, “it had no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth,” even of that heavenly “tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man^q.” There is he, not in a room darkened with a veil, but in the heaven of heavens; not in the presence of a bright cloud, a mere symbol of the Deity, but in the immediate presence of God himself; not presenting the blood of beasts, but his own most precious blood, that was once shed on Calvary; not offering a cloud of incense, but pouring forth his own prevailing intercession; not bearing a breast-plate with the names of the twelve tribes, but bearing on his breast the name of every individual of his elect; not appearing there for one people only, but for all the sinners of mankind; not obtaining mere temporal blessings, or spiritual blessings for a

^k Heb. vii. 1—3.

^l Ps. xc. 2. Prov. viii. 22—31.

^m Heb. vii. 26—28.

ⁿ Isai. liii. 10. with Heb. ix. 11, 12.

^o Col. ii. 9.

^p 1 John ii. 2.

^q Compare 2 Cor. iii. 10, 11. with ver. 1, 2.

limited period, but spiritual and eternal blessings, even all that man can need, or God bestow; not coming forth, himself a sinner, delegated to pronounce a blessing, but “appearing without sin to confer by his own authority everlasting salvation” on all his believing people^r.

Such are the views which the Apostle gives us of our great High-priest, and of “the transcendent excellence of his ministry.”]

JUDGE then,

1. What is our duty towards this great High-priest—

[As “a minister of this new covenant^s,” I hesitate not to say what my duty is. It is to make known this Saviour to you in all his offices: to set before you this covenant in all its fulness, its freeness, its sufficiency, its immutability: to point him out as the only Mediator of it, through whose sacrifice and intercession you must seek its blessings, and through whom alone you can obtain them: to open from time to time all the promises contained in it; and to lead you to a simple reliance on them, as the one only means of obtaining the accomplishment of them to your souls^t.

What then is your duty, but to contemplate these subjects with admiration, and love, and gratitude; and to seek a personal interest in them all? Contemplate “the covenant,” “ordered in all things, and sure;” and expect nothing but as the fruit of God’s eternal love, as expressed towards you in that covenant — — — Contemplate the peculiar privileges which you enjoy under this “better” covenant, above all that were ever enjoyed by God’s people of old — — — Contemplate Jesus as “the Mediator” of this covenant; and see all the conditions of it fulfilled *by him* for you, and all the blessings of it as the fruit of his sacrifice and intercession — — — Contemplate the “promises” of it, so abundant, so suitable, so sufficient, so sure to all who plead them before God, and rely upon them as the only ground of their hopes. In a word, look to the ministry of Christ, as the Jews did to that of their high-priests. They expected nothing but through the intervention of their appointed mediators: and do you in like manner expect nothing but in and through your adorable Advocate and Intercessor — — —]

^r Heb. ix. 28.

^s 2 Cor. iii. 6. διαθήκης the same word as in the text.

^t If this be the subject of an *Ordination* or *Visitation Sermon*, it will be proper to shew here how inadequately they execute the ministerial office who dwell on the evidences of Christianity, or on morals to the exclusion of the sublimer subjects.

2. The danger of neglecting it—

[The generality of Christians do lamentably neglect their duty in relation to our great High-priest. Instead of relying on that “better covenant,” of which he is “the Mediator,” they make covenants of their own *precisely similar to the Mosaic covenant*, which for its unprofitableness is abrogated and annulled^u. They reduce the standard of the moral law to their own fancied ability to fulfil it: they look for the first motions to good to arise from themselves, from some fancied stock of which they imagine themselves possessed; and then expect ulterior blessings as a reward for their own personal merits and deserts. They will be as little indebted to the free grace of God as possible: and, instead of receiving from the Lord Jesus Christ all their salvation as the fruit of what HE has done and suffered for them, they give him no higher honour than that of obtaining for them a right and a power to save themselves. And this is the covenant which they prefer, and for which they abandon that “better covenant,” which God has revealed in his Gospel. But let all such daring contemnors of the Gospel hear what the Apostle Paul speaks to them in this epistle: “If,” says he, “he that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted *the blood of the covenant* an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace^x.” Mark, this is not an assertion merely, but *an appeal*, an appeal to every considerate man: and, if you will only consider it candidly, I will consent that you shall be judges in your own cause — — — If you say, ‘I am not guilty of the things here spoken of;’ I ask, ‘How is it possible to deny your guilt, if you are systematically rejecting the Christian covenant, and substituting another of your own? or how can you be guiltless in respect to these things, when you thrust the Lord Jesus Christ from his mediatorial office, and seek to place his crown upon your own head?’ Beware, I pray you, of this fatal evil: for, “how shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation^y?” Remember, there is no other covenant whereby any human being can be saved; no promise, but what is contained in that; no mediator, through whom we can obtain an interest in it, but the Lord Jesus Christ. Lay hold on this covenant, and you are safe: reject it, and you perish for ever — — —]

^u Heb. vii. 18, 19.^x Heb. x. 28, 29.^y Heb. ii. 3.

MMCCCL.

CHRIST ABOVE THE LEVITICAL PRIESTS.

Heb. ix. 11, 12. *Christ being come an High-priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.*

THOUGH there are a multitude of types, besides those which were instituted by Moses, yet the most direct and complete representations of Christ are certainly to be found in the Mosaic ritual. Amidst the various ordinances relative to the priests and the temple, there is perhaps not any one point, however minute, which has not a typical reference, though, for want of an infallible instructor, we cannot precisely ascertain the meaning in every particular. The Epistle to the Hebrews, however, affords us great assistance in our inquiries into this subject, inasmuch as it declares the exact relation between the types and the one great Antitype in all the principal and most important points. The text especially, connected as it is with the whole preceding and following context, leads us to consider,

I. The resemblance between Christ and the Aaronic priests—

It would be endless to enumerate all the points of agreement between them: we shall rather confine our attention to those referred to in the text.

1. The high-priests were taken from among men to mediate between God and them—

[This is expressly declared to be the end of their institution^a. Aaron and his descendants were called to this office^b; and, in all the transactions between the Israelites and their God, they performed that office according to the commandment. Thus our blessed Lord was taken from among men; he was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. He assumed our nature for that very purpose, that he might be capable of

^a Heb. v. 1.

^b Heb. v. 4.

officiating as our great High-priest^c, and, in that nature, he both comes from God to us, and goes to God from us.]

2. Their mediation was to be carried on by means of sacrifices—

[The precise method in which they were to execute their office is recorded in the 16th of Leviticus: nor could they deviate from it in the least: if any but the high-priest had presumed to enter within the vail, or he, on any other day than that of the annual atonement, or even then without the blood of the sacrifices^d, he would have instantly been smitten, as a monument of Divine vengeance. Thus Christ approached not his God without a sacrifice^e. He presented his own sacred body as an offering for sin; and, having “offered himself without spot to God,” he is “gone with his own blood within the vail,” and makes that blood the ground of his intercession on our behalf^f.]

3. They obtained blessings for those on whose behalf they mediated—

[The judgments, which God had denounced against the transgressors of his law, were averted, when the high-priest had presented the accustomed offerings, and God was reconciled to his offending people. In like manner does Christ make reconciliation for us by the blood of his cross^g: He “gives his own life a ransom for us,” and thus redeems us from those awful judgments which our sins have merited. Nor is it a mere deliverance from punishment that we obtain through him: “we are brought nigh to God by his blood,” and are restored to the possession of our forfeited inheritance^h.]

But while the text intimates the resemblance between Christ and the high-priests, it most unequivocally declares also,

II. His pre-eminence above them—

This part of the subject also would open a large field for discussion: but, confining ourselves to the text, we shall notice his pre-eminence only in the particulars which are there specified.

1. He officiated in a far nobler tabernacle—

[As he belonged not to the tribe to which the priesthood attached, he could not exercise his ministry within the precincts allotted to themⁱ. The tabernacle therefore, in which he

^c Heb. ii. 14—17.

^d ver. 7.

^e Heb. viii. 3.

^f ver. 24. with the text.

^g Col. i. 20.

^h Eph. i. 7, 11.

ⁱ Heb. vii. 13.

officiated, was his own body, while he continued upon earth; and the heaven of heavens, when he ascended within the vail^k. How infinitely does this exalt him above all the Aaronic priests! We allow that the tabernacle was glorious: but what glory had it, when compared with Christ's immaculate body, in which, not a mere symbol only of the Divine presence dwelt, but all the fulness of the Godhead? And what was the holy of holies in comparison of heaven itself, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God? Surely in whichever light we view the tabernacle in which Christ officiated, we must acknowledge it to have been far "greater and more perfect than that which was made with hands."

2. He offered a far more valuable sacrifice—

[The high-priests could offer nothing but the blood of beasts, which had not in itself the smallest efficacy towards the expiation of sin: the virtue, which it had, was wholly derived from its typical relation to the great Sacrifice. But "Christ is entered into the holy place with his own blood;" and there presents it before God as a propitiation for our sins. Compare the sacrifices then, the blood of goats and of calves, with the blood of our incarnate God: who does not see the worthlessness of the one, and the infinite value of the other? No wonder that the former needed to be "offered year by year continually," since they had no power to take away sin, or to pacify an accusing conscience¹: but the latter fully satisfies for the sins of the whole world, and, having been once offered, perfects for ever them that are sanctified by it^m.]

3. He obtained far richer benefits for his people—

[The utmost that the high-priest obtained for the people was, a remission of those civil or political penalties which were annexed to their several transgressions: with respect to real pardon before God, the annual repetition of their sacrifices sufficiently manifested, that *that* was beyond the sphere of their influenceⁿ. But Christ has obtained for us redemption from all the bitter consequences of sin; as well from the sufferings, which we should have endured in the future world, as from the bondage, to which we should have remained subject in this present life. Nor are the effects of his sacrifice transient, like those under the law: it excels no less in the duration than in the greatness of the benefits it procures; it obtains for us, not redemption only, but "*eternal redemption*."

^k Heb. viii. 2. The "tabernacle" seems primarily to refer to his body. Compare John i. 14. Ἐσκήνωσεν, with Col. ii. 9. But it may also relate to heaven, since it certainly was a figure of that also. ver. 24.

¹ ver. 9. ^m 1 John ii. 2. Heb. x. 14. ⁿ Heb. x. 1, 4, 11.

Well then may he be called “an High-priest of *good things* ;” for there is nothing good in time or eternity, which he does not procure for those who seek an interest in his mediation.]

This subject may serve to SHEW us,

1. What use to make of the Levitical law—

[If we read it merely as a system of rites and ceremonies, without considering the end of its institution, it will appear absurd, and utterly unworthy of its Divine Author: but, if we view it in its relation to Christ, it will appear beautiful and very instructive. There is no longer a veil over it with respect to us^o; let us look at it therefore as at a mirror that reflects his glory; and we shall have no cause to regret the time and labour that we employ in exploring its mysterious contents.]

2. How to appreciate the blessings of redemption—

[We may form some judgment of them by meditating on the terrors of hell, and the glories of heaven: but there is nothing that can so fully discover their value, as a consideration of the price paid for them. Who can reflect on “the precious blood of Christ by which we are redeemed,” and entertain low thoughts of the blessings purchased by it? Would men be so indifferent about salvation, if they *thus* considered how great it was? Surely, it would be impossible: callous as the human heart is, it would melt into contrition at the sight of an expiring God^p. Let us but habituate ourselves to such views as these, and neither earth nor hell shall ever hold us in the bonds of sin. With such a sight of the prize, we shall never cease to run till we have obtained it.]

3. What grounds of hope there are for the very chief of sinners—

[Had any other price been paid for our redemption, many might have doubted whether it were sufficient for *them*: but who can doubt, when he knows, that he has been bought with the blood of Christ? This will expiate the foulest guilt: the difference, that exists between one sinner and another, is lost, when we apply to Christ’s infinitely meritorious atonement: its efficacy is the same, whatever degrees of guilt we may have contracted: it will avail for one as well as for another; nor is there any “sin of such a scarlet or crimson die, but it shall be made white as snow,” the very instant it is washed in this fountain: “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin.” Let none then despair: let us rather consider what “an High-priest we have over the house of God;” and “come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in the time of need^q.”]

^o 2 Cor. iii. 14. ^p Zech. xii. 10. ^q Heb. iv. 14, 16. and x. 19—22.

MMCCCII.

THE JEWISH SACRIFICES TYPICAL OF CHRIST'S.

Heb. ix. 13, 14. *If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

THE peculiar benefits of Christianity are usually displayed by contrasting our state with that of the heathen world: but they will be seen nearly to the same advantage, if we compare our privileges with those that were enjoyed under the Jewish dispensation. The Jews indeed had much that distinguished them above other nations: but we possess in substance what they enjoyed only in the shadow. One great object in the Epistle to the Hebrews is, to set this matter in a just point of view. This has been done with great perspicuity and strength of argument in the preceding context: and the author having shewn that we have a true, and *eternal* redemption obtained for us, while that accomplished by the Jewish ordinances was only typical and *temporal*, states afresh, in few words, the grounds of his conclusion, and appeals to every intelligent reader for the justness of it.

In discoursing on his words we shall shew,

I. The excellence of the type—

The Jewish ordinances were altogether typical of Christ's sacrifice—

[The ordinances mentioned in the text, though similar, as means of purifying from pollution, were very different from each other as to the kind of pollution which they were intended to remove. The blood of bullocks and goats was offered annually on the great day of expiation, to atone for the *moral* guilt both of the priests and people^a. The ashes of the heifer, which, together with cedar, hyssop, and scarlet, had

^a Lev. xvi. 6, 15.

been burnt without the camp, were to be mixed with running water, and sprinkled upon a person who had contracted any *ceremonial* uncleanness (as from the touch of a grave, a corpse, a human bone, or any thing that had been touched by an unclean person). On the third day, and on the seventh, they were to be sprinkled on him; and then he was to be esteemed clean^b. These were typical of Christ's sacrifice, by which the greatest sins may be forgiven; and without which, not even the smallest pollution imaginable can ever be purged away.]

As types, these certainly were deserving of much regard—

[While they shadowed forth, and prepared men for, the Messiah that should come, they conveyed many real benefits to those who conformed to the rules which they prescribed. The penitents who bewailed their moral defilements, had their hopes of mercy and forgiveness revived and strengthened: and they who, on account of some ceremonial uncleanness, were separated for seven long days from the house of God, and from all intercourse with their dearest friends, were restored, as it were to the bosom of the Church, and to communion with their God. Doubtless these rites were burthensome; but every one who valued the favour of God, and the blessings of social converse, would thankfully use the means which God had prescribed for the renewed enjoyment of them.]

Nevertheless the things, which were glorious in themselves, lost all their glory when contrasted with,

II. The superior excellence of the antitype—

As, by a type, we mean a shadowy representation of something future and substantial; so, by an antitype^c, we mean that thing which corresponds to the type, and had before been represented by it. The antitype then, or the thing that has been before represented, is, the sacrifice of Christ: and *this* infinitely excels all the ordinances by which it had been shadowed forth. The superior excellence of this appears particularly, in that,

1. It purifies the conscience—

[The legal offerings never could remove guilt from the conscience^d: they were mere remembrances of sins^e; and the

^b Numb. xix. 12.

^c Ἀντίτυπος, 1 Pet. iii. 21.

^d Heb. ix. 9.

^e Heb. x. 3, 4.

constant repetition of them shewed that those, which had been before offered, had not availed for the full discharge of the persons who offered them^f. But the blood of Christ, once sprinkled on the conscience, “perfects for ever them that are sanctified^g.” No other atonement is then wanted, or desired: the sinner needs only to exercise faith on that, and he will have peace in his soul; “being justified by faith, he shall have peace with God.” How strongly does this mark the superiority which we ascribe to the sacrifice of Christ!]

2. It sanctifies the life—

[Though the Jewish ordinances availed for the restoration of men to the enjoyment of outward privileges, they never could renew and sanctify the heart. On the contrary, they rather tended to irritate the minds of men against both the law, and him that enjoined it. But the blood of Christ sprinkled on the soul, instantly produces a visible change in the whole man: “the dead works” which were daily practised with delight, are now abandoned; and “the service of the living God,” which before appeared irksome, is now its chief joy. It is undeniable that many in every place throughout the world (wherever the Gospel is preached) have undergone a very great change in all their views, desires, and pursuits; they have become dead to the things of time and sense, and have devoted themselves in body, soul, and spirit, to the service of their God. Let the question be put to all of them, When did this change take place? there will be but one answer from them all: they will with one voice acknowledge, that it was effected by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon their hearts and consciences; that, till that blessed period, they were altogether carnal; and that from that time, they have been under the habitual influence of spiritual affections. What more can be wanting to establish the point before us?]

The pre-eminence of Christ above the legal offerings will yet further appear, while we shew,

III. How it is that the transcendent worth of the one may be inferred from the comparatively trifling value of the other—

The Apostle’s argument in the text is this: If the Jewish sacrifices availed for the smallest good, how much more will the sacrifice of Christ avail for the greatest possible good? The force of this argument will appear by comparing,

1. The nature of the offerings—

^f Heb. x. 2.

^g Heb. x. 10, 14.

[The blood that was sprinkled on men under the law, was merely the blood of worthless beasts: but what is that which is sprinkled on us? Let the voice of inspiration answer this question; It was "GOD that purchased the Church with *his own blood*^h." Astonishing mystery! "the blood of Christ" was the blood, not of a mere man, but of one who was God as well as man. How plain is the inference in this view! Surely, if the blood of a beast, which was only externally "spotless," availed for *any* thing, much more may the blood of Christ, that immaculate Lamb, avail for *every* thing.]

2. The persons by whom they were offered—

[Under the law the offerings were presented by sinful men, who needed first to offer for their own sins, before they were permitted to offer for the people's. But our sacrifice was offered by God himself: Christ was both the sacrifice and the priest: yea, each person of the ever-blessed Trinity was engaged in this stupendous work: the Father was the person to whom the sacrifice was offered; Christ was the person who offered it; and "the Eternal Spirit" concurred and co-operated with him in this mysterious act. Let then the offerings be compared in this view, and how infinite will the superiority of Christ's appear!]

3. The suitableness of each to the end proposed—

[What was there in the blood of bulls and goats that could wash away the stain of sin! How could that satisfy the Divine justice, or avert his wrath from sinful man? there was not the least affinity between the means and the end. But Christ was "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh;" and he assumed our nature on purpose that he might stand in our place and stead. Here was a perfect suitableness between the means and the end. Must the penalty due to sin be endured? He became a curse for us, and submitted to endure its just deserts. Must the law be fulfilled and honoured? He magnified it by his perfect obedience. And being God as well as man, he was at liberty to do this *for us*; and his substitution in our place is justly available for our salvation. How plain then is the Apostle's inference when viewed in this light! Surely, when these considerations are all combined, there will be a strength in his argument, and a force in his appeal, which must bear down every objection, and fix the deepest conviction on our minds.]

This subject may further lead us to OBSERVE,

1. How manifest is the doctrine of the divinity of Christ!

^h Acts xx. 28.

[We need not look to any passages that confirm this doctrine by direct assertions; since in the text it is contained with yet stronger evidence in a way of implication. Let it be supposed for one moment that Christ was a mere creature: how will the Apostle's argument then appear? If the blood of one creature avails for the obtaining of a mere shadowy and temporal benefit, how much more shall the blood of another creature avail for the obtaining of all that God himself can bestow? This were as absurd as to say, if a child can lift a feather, how much more can a grown person lift a mountain? Such an appeal would be unworthy of any man that pretends to common sense; and much more of an inspired Apostle. But let the divinity of Christ be acknowledged, and the appeal is clear, convincing, incontrovertible. Indeed the doctrines of the atonement and of the divinity of Christ are so interwoven with each other, that neither of them can be denied without effectually subverting both. Let us seek then to be well established in these important truths.]

2. How necessary is it to trust entirely in Christ's atonement!

[It is not possible to state a case more strongly than this is stated in a chapter before referred toⁱ. We cannot conceive less guilt to be contracted by any act than by unwittingly touching a thing, which, unknown to us, had been before touched by an unclean person: yet nothing but the sprinkling of the ashes of a red heifer could ever remove the uncleanness contracted by it: if the person that had contracted it were the holiest man on earth, and were to shed rivers of tears on account of what he had done, and increase his circumspection in future an hundredfold, it would be all to no purpose; he must die as a defiler of God's sanctuary, if he did not use the purification which the law appointed. How much more then must that soul perish which is not purified by the blood of Christ! How impossible is it that even the smallest sin should ever be expiated in any other way! Let this then teach us to look unto Christ continually, and to have our consciences ever sprinkled with his precious blood.]

3. How inseparable is the connexion between faith and works!

[They greatly err, who think that the doctrines of faith are subversive of morality. The very faith that purges the conscience from guilt, purifies the life also from dead works, and animates us to serve the living God. Let this connexion then be seen in our lives; so shall we most effectually remove the calumny; and "by well-doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."]

ⁱ Numb. xix.

MMCCCIII.

NO REMISSION WITHOUT BLOOD.

Heb. ix. 22. *Without shedding of blood is no remission.*

THE external administration of religion has been extremely different in different ages of the world: but the method of acceptance with God has been invariably the same. Before the Mosaic ritual was formed, pardon was dispensed through the blood of sacrifices: and since it was abolished, men obtain mercy through that blood, which the sacrifices both before and under the law were intended to prefigure.

To mark the correspondence between the sacrifices under the law, and that offered by Jesus on the cross, is the great scope of the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the preceding context it is observed, that the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry were purged with blood; and then it is asserted as an universal truth, "that without shedding of blood there is no remission."

This assertion being of infinite importance, we shall,

I. Establish it—

The observances of the ceremonial law shew that men were saved by blood under the Mosaic dispensation—

[For every offence, sacrifices were to be offered according to the rank and quality of the offender: and whatever animals were sacrificed, whether bullocks, goats, lambs, or pigeons, they were to be slain, and their blood was to be sprinkled both on the altar, and on the offerer: and it was by the blood so sprinkled, that the offerer was cleansed from guilt. If a person were so poor that he could not bring a pair of young pigeons, he was at liberty to offer a measure (about five pints) of fine flour: a portion of which, answerably to the destruction of the beasts, was to be burnt, in order to shew the offender what he merited at the hands of God^a.

There were indeed other purifications, some by fire, and

^a Lev. v. 6—13.

others by water: but these were for ceremonial only, and never for moral defilement.

Thus the law, with the one exception above mentioned, spake exactly the language of the text.]

The same way of salvation still obtains under the Gospel—

[The typical sacrifices are indeed superseded by the one sacrifice of Christ. But it is through his sacrifice, and through it alone, that any man is saved.]

This is capable of *direct* proof from Scripture—

[The warning which Eli gave to his sons, when they poured contempt upon the sacrifices, and caused them to be abhorred by the people, not obscurely intimated, that acts of injustice towards men might be punished by the magistrate, and yet be forgiven through the great Sacrifice: but that, if any person poured contempt upon the sacrifices, he rejected the only means of salvation, and must therefore inevitably perish^b.

There is a yet stronger assertion to this effect in the chapter following the text, where it is said in the most express terms, that they who reject this Sacrifice have nothing to expect but wrath and fiery indignation^c; which could not be true, if there were any other way of salvation provided for us.]

It may be yet further proved by arguments, which, though of an *indirect* nature, are not less satisfactory than the foregoing—

If salvation be not by blood, *the whole Mosaic ritual was absurd*—

[For what end could so many innocent beasts be slaughtered, and consumed by fire, if it were not to prefigure the great Sacrifice? If they were intended to shadow forth the way of salvation through the sacrifice of Christ, there was abundant reason for such observances; and the lives of myriads of beasts were well bestowed in such a cause. But on any other supposition, the legal sacrifices, having no typical reference, were unworthy of God to institute, or of man to offer.]

If salvation be not by blood, *the prophets grossly misrepresented their Messiah*—

[Christ was spoken of as “making his soul an offering for sin;” as having “our iniquities laid upon him;” as “wounded for our transgressions,” that he might “heal us by his stripes^d.” it was foretold that he should “be cut off; but not for himself;” that he should “finish transgression, make reconciliation for

^b 1 Sam. ii. 17, 25. ^c Heb. x. 26, 27. ^d Isai. liii. 5—12.

iniquity, make an end of sin, and bring in an everlasting righteousness^e:" yea, he was prophesied of as "a fountain that should be opened for sin and for uncleanness^f:" and John, who was more than a prophet, pointed him out as that very Lamb of God, that should take away the sins of the world^g. Now what can be the meaning of these passages? how are they applicable to Christ, if they do not mark out his atonement? and what truth is there in such representations, if we be not to seek remission through his atoning blood?]

If salvation be not by blood, the declarations of the Apostles, yea, and of Christ himself, are far more likely to mislead, than to instruct the world—

[Christ expressly told his Disciples, that his "blood was shed for the remission of sins^h." And the Apostles uniformly declare, that God purchased the Church with his own bloodⁱ; that our reconciliation to God^k, and our justification before him^l, together with our complete redemption^m, are by blood, even by the blood of Christ, that spotless Lambⁿ. Is this the way to teach men that they shall be saved by their works? Must we not utterly despair of understanding any thing they have said, if we are not to expect salvation by the blood of Christ?]

The Apostle's assertion being thus fully established, we shall,

II. Improve it—

The death of Christ has an aspect upon every thing that relates to our souls.

But not to enumerate many points, let us REFLECT on,

1. The evil of sin—

[We are assured that not one sin could have been forgiven without shedding of blood. Nor was it the blood of bulls and of goats only that was necessary, but the blood of God's dear Son, even of Jehovah's Fellow: what then must sin be, that required such a sacrifice? We behold the evil of it in the miseries that are in the world; and still more in the torments of the damned: but most of all do we see its malignity in the sufferings of the Son of God; without which not the smallest transgression could ever have been expiated. Let

^e Dan. ix. 24, 26.

^h Matt. xxvi. 28.

^k Eph. ii. 16. Col. i. 20.

^m Eph. i. 7. Rev. v. 9.

^f Zech. xiii. 1.

ⁱ Acts xx. 28.

^l Rom. v. 9.

ⁿ 1 Pet. i. 19.

^g John i. 29.

us then view sin in this light, and we shall no more account it a small and venial evil.]

2. The folly of self-righteousness—

[Self-righteousness consists in substituting something of our own in the place of the atonement, or in blending something of our own with it. In either case we utterly make void the death of Christ°. And what madness is this! It is, in fact, to shut ourselves out from all hope of pardon, and to rivet our sins upon our souls for ever.

It may be thought indeed that Christ died to purchase us a right and power to save ourselves by our works. But if this was the case, why did St. Paul impute the rejection of his own nation to their going about to establish their own righteousness^p? and why did he desire to be found in Christ, *not having his own righteousness*^q? Why did he declare that if any man were circumcised with a view to obtain justification by the law, Christ should profit him nothing^r? Why did he contrast salvation by grace, and salvation by works, so as to shew that they could not be blended or consist together^s? This alas! is a refuge of lies, which, together with all who flee to it, will be swept away with the besom of destruction.

Let us not then dare to put ourselves in that way, wherein God declares there is no remission.]

3. The encouragement which the Gospel affords to sinners—

[When it is said that “without shedding of blood there is no remission,” it is doubtless implied, that through shedding of blood there is remission. And what a glorious truth is this! how refreshing to the weary soul! Let it be contemplated with holy joy and wonder. There is no sin, however great, from which the blood of Christ will not cleanse the soul^t. David, after contracting the foulest guilt, was yet able to say, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow^u. Let every one then go to the fountain opened for sin; let him plunge, as it were, beneath that sacred flood; and he shall instantly become pure and spotless in the sight of God^x.”]

4. The wonderful love of Christ—

[He knew that sin could not be forgiven, unless he would take upon him our nature, and make atonement for us by his own blood. And rather than leave us to perish as the fallen

° Gal. ii. 21.

^p Rom. ix. 31, 32. and x. 3.

^q Phil. iii. 9.

^r Gal. v. 2, 4.

^s Rom. xi. 6.

^t 1 John i. 7.

^u Ps. li. 7.

^x Eph. v. 25, 27.

angels, he accepted the hard conditions, left the bosom of his Father, put himself in our place, and submitted to endure the penalty due to sin. O what transcendent love! how inconceivable its heights, how unsearchable its depths^y! Let our minds dwell upon it continually; that our hearts being warmed with this mysterious, incomprehensible love, we may be ever vying with the hosts of heaven in singing, "To him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever^z."

^y Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^z Rev. i. 5, 6.

MMCCCIV.

USE OF TYPICAL PURIFICATIONS.

Heb. ix. 23. *It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better things than these.*

THERE is very considerable difficulty in this passage. The scope of the whole chapter is clear: it is intended to shew, that, whilst the sacrifice of Christ was shadowed forth by the Levitical sacrifices, it was infinitely superior to them all. But the difficulty arises from the double meaning of the word which we translate "Testament:" it means either a covenant, or a testament: and the Apostle, having used it evidently in the former sense, comes, apparently at least, to use it in the latter sense: and the doubt is, whether the entire passage should be construed as relating to the *covenant*, or whether the idea of a *testament* should be admitted. On either construction, there will be difficulty; for, on the one hand, it is not easy to see what a mediator has to do with a testament; nor, on the other hand, what need there is for a person, making a covenant, to die, before it can become valid. Perhaps the best solution of the difficulty, if solution it may be called, is this: That an agreement, as entered into between two parties, is a *covenant*: but that a free gift, as that agreement evidently is on God's part, and a gift of something through the death of him who obtains it for us, assumes somewhat of the character of a *testament*. A

covenant, it is well known, was ratified with a sacrifice; and the victim must die, before the covenant could be complete. It is equally clear, that a testament is of force only when the testator is dead: so that, in both cases, death must ensue, before the instrument can be valid: in the one case, the death of a victim; in the other case, the death of the party himself. But, I confess, this is not very satisfactory; and perhaps, after all, the best way is, to take the idea of a *covenant* throughout the whole, and to put that construction on the word in the different places where it is translated "testament." This will preserve more of unity throughout; and be, upon the whole, least liable to objection.

However, whilst I state the difficulty as appearing in the context, it is proper to observe, that it does not at all affect the sense of our text. *That* is clear and determinate; and it will open to us a field of rich instruction, whilst I shew from it,

I. Whence arose a necessity for typical purifications—

Typical purifications were made on many occasions—

[The Apostle here refers to them, first, as made for the *ratification of the covenant* which God entered into with his people on Mount Horeb: yet, if we compare his account with that of Moses, we shall see several points of difference between the two; because, though the Apostle *principally* referred to that occasion, he had other occasions in his mind, which he comprehended with it. The account of Moses is, that Moses first related to the people the terms of God's covenant—that the people consented to them—that Moses then wrote them in a book—that the next morning early he built an altar, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings upon it—that he then put half of the blood into basons, and sprinkled the other half upon the altar, having previously, it should seem, put the book upon the altar—then he read to them from the book the very same words which he had before delivered orally; and they again renewed their consent to them, and their perfect acquiescence in the terms proposed—then he took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you con-

cerning all these words^a." To this account the Apostle adds, that the blood was mixed with water; and that, by means of scarlet wool and hyssop, he sprinkled with it the book, and all the people^b. His sprinkling of the book is easily accounted for, by supposing it to have been laid upon the altar: and his sprinkling of *all* the people, by his sprinkling it on *the representatives of all*. And it may be, that water was mixed with the blood in order to facilitate the sprinkling of it; and that scarlet wool and hyssop were used by him for the purpose of sprinkling it more widely than he could do with his fingers. If we suppose these things, there will be no disagreement between the two statements; only the Apostle's will be the fuller. But, as the Apostle unquestionably refers to other occasions of sprinkling besides that when the covenant was made, I rather suppose, that he, in this particular enumeration of minute circumstances, (such as the use of water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop,) refers to the purification of the leper, in which these things were used by the express command of God^c.

I have said, that the Apostle unquestionably refers to other occasions besides the making of the covenant: and that he does so, appears from his mention of "the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry^d:" for the tabernacle was not then reared; nor were the vessels of the ministry made; nor had the covenant above-mentioned any thing to do with "remission of sins^e." But afterwards, when the tabernacle was reared, and furnished with all the vessels belonging to it, then was there a solemn sprinkling of them all with blood. The account deserves particular attention, because it reflects the clearest light upon the Apostle's statement in my text. At that time, and for ever afterwards on the great day of atonement, was "an atonement made for the *holy sanctuary* itself, as well as for the tabernacle of the congregation; and for the *altar* too, no less than for the priests and the congregation." On every thing was the blood of atonement sprinkled, in order to cleanse the whole, even every vessel from the pollution it contracted by being used in the service of sinful man^f.]

But whence arose a necessity for these purifications?—

[Doubtless, the necessity arose, primarily, from the mere arbitrary appointment of God, who had commanded them to be made. But, subordinate to that, there were other, *and most important*, reasons too for these ordinances: for by purifying every thing with blood, God first *shewed to his people their extreme need of mercy*; next, He *shadowed forth*

^a Exod. xxiv. 3—8.

^b ver. 19, 20.

^c Lev. xiv. 4—7.

^d ver. 21.

^e ver. 22.

^f Lev. xvi. 15—20, 33.

to them the mercy which he had in reserve for them; and, lastly, He confirmed their expectation of that mercy in his appointed time.

What could a sinner think, when he understood that the very altar of God itself, yea, and the most holy place, the immediate residence of the Deity, needed to be purified with blood, because they were defiled by their use in the service of man? Must he not feel that his depravity was extreme, when his very best services were so polluted, that not only must *they* be purified with blood, but the very altar, on which his offerings were laid, and the sanctuary itself also, into which the blood of them was carried, must be purged with blood also? Truly these ordinances were a daily source of the deepest humiliation to every soul amongst them.

But knowing, as of necessity they must, that these ordinances were only “shadows of good things to come^g,” they would look forward to a better sacrifice, which should in due time be offered. They would see that remission of sins can be obtained through blood alone, through the blood of an innocent victim shed in their place and stead, and through the sprinkling of that blood upon their souls.

And by the daily repetition of the same ordinances, they must be constantly reminded of God’s gracious purposes towards them; and be assured that he would, in due time, accomplish all that he had promised.

Thus were the typical purifications necessary in their place.]

But it was not in the patterns only of heavenly things that there existed a need of purification, but “in the heavenly things themselves.” I must therefore proceed to shew,

II. What necessity there is for purification in the things typified—

Under the new covenant, no less than under the old, must every thing be purified with blood—

[*Our persons* are altogether polluted and defiled: our bodies are a mass of corruption, our souls a sink of iniquity. There is no abomination that sin has brought into the world, but the soul is the very womb in which it is generated, or rather the fountain from whence it flows, as its proper and perennial source. How can such a creature find acceptance with a holy God, if there be not found some blood capable of purifying him from guilt, and some water capable of cleansing him from his inherent defilements?

^g Heb. x. 1.

Our services also must, of necessity, partake of all this defilement: for “who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” Verily, as our common actions in life need purification; so do our very tears need to be washed, and our repentances to be repented of.

But of “the heavenly things” spoken of in my text, *heaven itself* is the principal: for it is *that* which was typified by the most holy place; it is that of which the sanctuary was intended to be a “*pattern*.” And does *that* need purification? Yes, it does: nor could God himself endure it as a residence, so to speak, if it were not cleansed from the defilement it contracts by the introduction of sinners into it. Therefore, as the high-priest sprinkled the sanctuary with blood; so does our great High-priest, who “has entered into heaven, with his own blood^h” sprinkle and purify that holy place, and thus “prepare it as a mansion for his believing peopleⁱ.]

But for this end there must be a better sacrifice than any that were offered under the law—

[The blood of beasts might suffice to cleanse men from *ceremonial* defilement: but it could never avail for the cleansing of *moral* guilt in any one particular: no; “it was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin^k.” To effect *that* was beyond the power of any created being. Had the first archangel assumed our nature for that end, he would have failed in the attempt. To so great a work none but God himself was competent: and God himself must become a man, and shed his own blood for us, ere one single sin can be blotted out from the book of God’s remembrance, or one of our fallen race be able to present to God one acceptable service. All that was shadowed forth under the law must actually be fulfilled. The Son of the living God must take upon him our nature; must die as an atonement for sin; must enter into heaven with his own blood; must sprinkle that blood upon the mercy-seat, and before the mercy-seat; must sprinkle *us* also, even every child of man who shall ever be interested in his atonement: even the covenant itself, too, must he sprinkle with his blood, in order to its ratification before God, and its application to our souls: all this, I say, must be done, in order to the admission of any human being to the realms of bliss. It is all necessary *for God’s honour*; for no less a sacrifice than this would satisfy his justice: and it is all equally necessary *for our happiness*; since nothing less can bring peace into our consciences, or operate with a transforming efficacy on our souls.

As the patterns then of these things needed a purification

^h ver. 12.

ⁱ John xiv. 2, 3.

^k Heb. x. 4.

by the blood of beasts, so do the things typified need to be purged by the blood of our incarnate God.]

Let us, then, LEARN from these things,

1. The need we all have of the covenant of grace—

[God, as you know, has made a covenant with us. And this covenant we must receive. We must, as all Israel did, declare our consent to it, and engage to look for life on the terms which it prescribes. St. Paul says, “This is the blood of the covenant which God has *enjoined* unto you.” If God had only *offered* it as a gift, methinks no sinner in the universe should have hesitated to accept it: but God *enjoins* it with authority; and declares, that on no other terms whatever shall any sinner ever find acceptance with him. Accept, then, this covenant. Think not to make covenants of your own, whereby to secure some glory to yourselves: for you may be assured that God will never agree to any other, than that which he has proposed, and his only dear Son has ratified. The Israelites were not left to modify the covenant after their own taste; but were required to accept that which was given them of the Lord. So is there no other alternative for you, but to accept or reject the covenant of grace. If you think but one moment, you would not wish for any other covenant than that which is revealed, wherein God gives all, and you receive all. For what could you do to recommend either your persons or your services to God? If you were to shed rivers of tears, you could never wash away so much as one sin: nor, whatever efforts you might make, could you ever offer one single service, which should stand the test of God’s law, and defy the eye of Omniscience to discern a flaw in it. I say again, therefore, lay hold on this covenant; and look for all its blessings, as the free gift of God for Christ’s sake.]

2. The way in which we may become partakers of it—

[You have already seen how Moses sprinkled all the people with the blood of the sacrifice: and by that sprinkling were they all made partakers of it: and in the same way must you also become partakers of the covenant of grace. St. Paul tells us, that to this sprinkling of blood every believer comes¹: and St. Peter tells us, that by it every believer is saved^m. In truth, as it was the shedding of the blood of Christ that satisfied the Divine Majesty, and ratified the covenant; so is it the sprinkling of that blood on our hearts and consciences that can alone entitle us to its benefits. But, in relation to this matter, there is a very important difference between the Israelites and

¹ Heb. xii. 24.

^m 1 Pet. i. 2.

us. *They were sprinkled in the persons of their representatives: but we must be sprinkled in our own persons: nothing amongst us can be done by proxy. We must ourselves dip the scarlet wool and hyssop, so to speak, in the blood of our great Sacrifice; and by faith must sprinkle it on our own hearts and consciences. Yea, we must daily sprinkle with it both our persons and our services, and look for heaven as prepared for us by it, that we may to all eternity sing, "To Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." "The sacrifice of Christ was unto God of a sweet-smelling savour": let it be so to us also; and all that has been purchased by it shall be ours.]*

ⁿ Eph. v. 2.

MMCCCV.

THE HOLY OF HOLIES A TYPE.

Heb. ix. 24. *Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.*

IT appears, at first sight, unworthy of God to appoint with such precision every the minutest circumstance relating to the tabernacle and its services. Provided he were worshipped and served, it should seem a matter of no importance whether the place, wherein he was worshipped, were of such or such an exact form, or whether the ceremonies observed in his worship were exactly of such or such a kind. But God intended to prefigure every thing relating to the Messiah and his kingdom: and therefore it was necessary not only that a model of every thing should be given to Moses^a, but that these patterns of heavenly things, made by Moses according to that model, should undergo a purification by the blood of carnal sacrifices, that so the heavenly things themselves, which were to be purified by the great Sacrifice, might be the more evidently prefigured^b. These types having been given, Christ accomplished them on earth in part, and is now perfecting the accom-

^a Heb. viii. 5.

^b ver. 23.

plishment of them in heaven ; whither he is gone, as the high-priests went into the holy of holies, to appear before God on behalf of his people.

It is our intention to shew,

I. In what respect heaven was typified by the holy of holies—

The whole edifice of the tabernacle or temple was a figure of Christ's human nature, in which the God-head dwelt ; and of the Church also, in which God resides^c. But the most holy place, which is also called " the tabernacle^d," eminently represented heaven :

1. It was the immediate residence of the Deity—

[The Shechinah, the bright cloud, which was the symbol of the Deity, dwelt between the cherubims upon the mercy-seat ; and there God manifested himself more than in any other place on earth^e. Thus also, but in an infinitely brighter manner, does he display his glory in heaven. He is indeed on earth and even in hell ; neither can the heaven of heavens contain him ; for he pervades all space. But, though he is on our right hand, we cannot see him ; nor, if we look for him on the left hand, can he be found by us^f. But in heaven he is seen face to face ; and all the heavenly hosts behold him shining forth in all the brightness of his glory.]

2. It was inaccessible, except with the blood of sacrifices—

[No person whatever was to enter into the sanctuary, except the high-priest, nor could *he*, except on the great day of annual expiation ; nor even then, except with the blood of beasts, that had been offered in sacrifice to God^g. Thus is there no admittance into heaven but through the blood of our great Sacrifice. Not even our great High-priest himself, when he had become the Surety and Substitute of sinners, could enter there without his own precious blood^h ; and heaven itself needed, as it were, to be purified from the defilement it contracted through the admission of sinners into it, even as the sanctuary, with all the vessels of it, were purified from the pollutions they had contracted through the ministration of sinful manⁱ.]

^c John ii. 19, 21. 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.

^e Exod. xxv. 22.

^g ver. 7. "*not without blood.*"

ⁱ ver. 21, 23. with Lev. xvi. 16.

^d ver. 3.

^f Job xxiii. 8, 9.

^h ver. 12.

3. It was the repository of all the principal memorials of God's power and grace—

[The Apostle enumerates the various things which were deposited in the holy of holies^k; all of them, either memorials of God's providential care, or exhibitions of his covenant love. And are they not all in heaven, concentrated and combined in the person of Christ? Christ is the true ark, in which the law is kept, and fulfilled: and, while he makes intercession for his people, he is also the food of their souls, and the performer of all those miracles of grace that are wrought on their behalf. We cannot behold him, but we must immediately be persuaded that God is able and willing to accomplish for us all that our necessities may require.]

But while we see that the true tabernacle, even heaven itself, was prefigured by the holy places made with hands, let us consider,

II. The end for which our Lord ascended thither—

Our Lord could not go into the earthly tabernacle, because he was not of that tribe to which the priesthood belonged: but into the heavenly sanctuary he went,

1. As our Forerunner—

[God has ordained, that all his people should one day dwell with him around his throne. All true penitents now are priests unto God, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, male or female^l: and Jesus is gone, as he himself tells us, to prepare places for them^m. He is expressly said to be gone within the vail as our Forerunnerⁿ. Let us then contemplate him in this view; and look forward to the time when we shall follow him within the vail, and “be presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.”]

2. As our Head and Representative—

[It was not as an individual merely that Christ ascended into heaven, but as the Head and Representative of his redeemed people. All that he did and suffered was in their place and stead. Hence they are said to be “circumcised in him,” and to be “buried with him in baptism,” and “crucified

^k ver. 4, 5. The Apostle does not say, that the censer, or altar of incense, as θυμιατήριον may signify, was *in* the holy of holies (for it was on the outside of the vail), but that the holy of holies *had* it: *that* being of very distinguished use, when the high-priest entered within the vail.

^l Rev. i. 6.

^m John xiv. 2, 3.

ⁿ Heb. vi. 20.

with him." In the same capacity also he went within the vail, to appear in the presence of God for us. Hence we are said to be "risen with him," yea, to be already "sitting with him in heavenly places^o." And on this our hope greatly depends: for, *because* "our life is hid with Christ in God, we may be assured that, when he shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory^p."]

3. As our Advocate and High-priest—

[It is in this view that the Apostle principally speaks of him in the text. The end for which the high-priest entered into the typical sanctuary, was, to present the blood of the sacrifice, and to cover the mercy-seat with the clouds of incense. It was precisely thus that Jesus went into the heaven of heavens for us. He is gone to present his own blood before the throne of God, and to plead the merit of that blood on behalf of sinful men. And it is on this very account that he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, namely, because he ever liveth to make intercession for them^q.]

INFER—

1. How excellent is the Gospel salvation !

[The Mosaic economy was excellent in comparison of the state of heathens, because it provided a way of acceptance with God, a way, too, that was of divine appointment. But the Gospel points out to us a far greater Priest, officiating in a nobler tabernacle, presenting an infinitely richer sacrifice, and offering a more powerful intercession on our behalf. Let us then value this Gospel, and search into its contents, and seek its blessings with our whole hearts.]

2. What encouragement have all to embrace and to hold fast this Gospel !

[Were any thing wanting to complete the work of salvation for us, we might well hesitate, before we embraced the overtures of the Gospel. But a view of Christ as our High-priest dissipates our fears, and encourages both the weakest and the vilest to come to God through him. "If any man sin," says the Apostle, "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is also the propitiation for our sins^r." Again it is said, "Seeing we have a great High-priest, *that is passed into the heavens*, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession^s:" and again, "Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, and having an

^o Eph. ii. 6.

^p Col. iii. 3, 4.

^q Heb. vii. 25.

^r 1 John ii. 2.

^s Heb. iv. 14.

High-priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith^t." Let us then make this improvement of the subject; so shall we, each in his appointed order, appear before God for ourselves, and dwell in his immediate presence for ever and ever.]

^t Heb. ix. 19, 21, 22.

MMCCCVI.

CHRIST'S APPEARANCE TO TAKE AWAY SIN.

Heb. ix. 26. *Now once, in the end of the world, hath he appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

TO obtain a just knowledge of the Gospel, we should view it in its connexion with the law; partly, in a way of comparison; and partly, in a way of contrast. From the comparison, we shall ascertain its nature: from the contrast, we shall learn its excellency. Compare it with the law; and you will find that it agrees with the law, as the seal with the impression on the wax: there is not the smallest feature in the law, to which there will not be found a corresponding lineament in the Gospel. But there are in the Gospel points which the law could by no means exhibit. Its priests were *men*, who *needed first to offer for themselves*. They officiated in an *earthly tabernacle*; and presented *only beasts*, for offerings; and *presented them often*, on account of their *inefficacy to expiate* the sins of men. But the High-priest under the Gospel is no other than *God himself*; who, having assumed our nature, offered *his own body, once for all*; and is entered into *heaven itself*, there to carry on and *perfect his work* for all who come to God through him. It is in this view that the Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of in the passage before us. He is *contrasted* with the priests under the law, as "not having entered, like them, into the *holy places made with hands*, which are the figures of the true; but into *heaven itself*, now to appear in the presence of God for us:" and as "*not offering himself often*, as the high-priest entered into the holy place *every year*, with *blood of others*; for then

must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world. But now *once*, in the end of the world, hath he appeared to put away sin by *the sacrifice of himself*."

From these words I shall take occasion to shew,

I. The insufficiency of the Mosaic sacrifices—

By "the end of the world," we are to understand, the end of the Mosaic dispensation^a. During that period, sacrifices were offered. But they were insufficient for the removal of sin.

1. They had not in themselves any suitableness to that end—

[What virtue could there be in the blood of bulls and of goats? "It was not possible for them to take away sin^b."]

2. They were not ordained of God for that end—

[They were intended only to prefigure Christ; and to direct the eyes of men to him, and to keep up the expectation of him in the world^c.]

3. The very repetition of them was an acknowledgment of this—

[Had they fully expiated sin, there would have been no occasion for the repetition of them; and "they would therefore, of course, have ceased to be offered^d."]

In contrast with them, we here behold,

II. The perfection of the Christian Sacrifice—

"To put away sin the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world."

He was a proper sacrifice for sin—

[He was altogether spotless, both in body and soul^e. In him, therefore, there was both a suitableness for a sacrifice, and sufficiency to make atonement for sin: a suitableness, because he was a partaker of *our* nature; and a sufficiency, because he was a partaker also of the *divine* nature. On him the iniquities of the whole world were laid^f; and under the curse due to them he died^g.]

^a That period is called the Fulness of Times, Gal. iv. 4. Eph. i. 10; and the Last Days, Heb. i. 2. 1 Pet. i. 20; and the Ends of the World, 1 Cor. x. 11.

^b Heb. x. 4.

^c Heb. viii. 5.

^d Heb. x. 1, 2.

^e 1 John. iii. 5.

^f Isai. liii. 6.

^g Gal. iii. 13.

By his one offering of himself, he effected what the Mosaic sacrifices never could—

[He put away sin from before God, “who is reconciled to us through the blood of the cross^h,” and he put it away also from man, both in its guilt and power. So did he cancel the guilt of men, that “all who believe in him are justified from all thingsⁱ,” and so did he break its power, that it never can have dominion over one of his redeemed people^k.]

INFER—

1. How highly privileged are we who live *in the present age!*

[We have not to present to God those poor and worthless sacrifices which left the conscience still burthened with guilt^l; but can plead one which is a sufficient propitiation for the sins of the whole world^m, and “perfects for ever all them that are sanctifiedⁿ.”]

2. What infatuation are they guilty of, who hold fast their sins!

[Think what has been done to deliver us from them. God has laid them all upon his only-begotten Son, that they might be “put away from us, as far as the east is from the west.” But, in holding them fast, we say, in fact, “Thou shalt never wash my soul^o.” I regard not thy tender mercies: I prefer my sinful gratifications before all that thou canst do for me; and I will have them, in despite of all that thou hast threatened to do against me.’—Say, beloved, what will be your views of this conduct, in a short time? The Lord grant, that, ere it be too late, you may believe in Christ; lest “the corner-stone, which you so ungratefully reject, should fall upon you, and grind you to powder!”]

^h Col. i. 21, 22.

ⁱ Acts xiii. 39.

^k Rom. vi. 14.

^l ver. 9.

^m 1 John ii. 2.

ⁿ Heb. x. 14.

^o John xiii. 8.

MMCCCVII.

CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

Heb. ix. 27, 28. *As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation.*

IT is probable that many in the first ages of Christianity wondered, as indeed many even at this time do,

how persons should be saved by the death of Christ, thousands of years before he came into the world; more especially since the most solemn sacrifices under the Jewish economy were of no effect beyond the year in which they were offered. But the Jewish sacrifices needed to be repeated, because they were worthless and inefficient: whereas the perfection of Christ's sacrifice gave it a retrospective and prospective efficacy, so that, at whatever period of the world it should be offered, it needed never to be repeated. This is the scope of the passage before us; and the Apostle illustrates his argument by an awful and acknowledged truth. To comprehend the force of his observations, we must consider,

I. Man's destination to death and judgment—

Every man must die—

[This is too obvious to need a proof. Whatever be our age, condition, pursuits, and prospects, we must *die*. If our life were protracted to the age of Methuselah, we must die at last: God has "appointed" it; nor shall his decree be either defeated or reversed. But it is only "once" that we can die. Though some few who have been miraculously restored to life, have died a second time, we must not expect to return from our graves. If the great work of salvation be not completed before we die, we shall be undone for ever^a.]

After death we shall all be judged—

[God has appointed a day, wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, and reward every man according to his works. And this also shall be but "once:" for, though every man's state is fixed as soon as he goes into the invisible world, it is not till the general resurrection that his body shall participate the portion assigned to his soul. And, as there is *no return from death* to another state of probation, so there is *no appeal from the sentence that shall be passed* in that day.]

The Apostle having mentioned this, proceeds to state,

II. A similar appointment respecting Christ—

Christ "once" died for the sins of men—

[Though in appearance our Saviour died like other men, yet in reality his death was altogether different from theirs.

^a Eccl. ix. 10.

He died as a sacrifice for sin: his death was that very atonement which had been typically represented from the beginning of the world. But though he was to be "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world," he died only "once." The legal sacrifices were constantly repeated, because they were rather "remembrances of sins" than a real expiation of them: but "he, by one offering of himself, hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified^b;" and "many," even all that believe in him, have their sins removed for ever by virtue of it.]

He also will "appear a second time" at the day of judgment—

[At his first coming he appeared "in the likeness of sinful flesh^c," and was treated as a sinner both by God and man: but at his second coming he will assume a very different appearance. As the high-priest, while offering the annual sacrifices, was clothed only in plain linen garments, but when he had completed his sacrifice, came forth in his splendid robes to bless the people^d; so our great High-priest will put off the garb of humiliation, and shine forth in all his majesty and glory^e. At his first coming, he saved not himself; but, at that day, he will impart "salvation" unto others, even to all who seek him in sincerity and truth.]

The Apostle having introduced God's appointment respecting man to illustrate that respecting Christ, we shall point out,

III. The correspondence and connexion between them—

The mention of death and judgment as appointed unto man was not at all necessary to the Apostle's argument: but, *as an illustration of it*, it was very pertinent.

1. Death and judgment are the consequents of *sin*; and the first and second coming of Christ shall be the means of *salvation*.

[If there had been no sin, there would have been no death, nor any occasion for a day of judgment: and, if Christ had not come to bear the sins of men, there would have been no salvation: all must have inevitably and eternally perished. Moreover, as the law required that the High-priest, after having finished his work within the vail, should come forth to bless

^b Heb. x. 14.

^c Rom. viii. 3.

^d Lev. xvi. 23, 24. with viii. 7, 9. and Numb. vi. 23, 24.

^e Matt. xxv. 31.

the people; so in the Divine appointment, Christ's second coming is necessary to the complete salvation of his followers.]

2. Death and judgment shall be *fatal to unbelievers*; and the first and second coming of Christ shall be *means of salvation to them that believe*—

[The Lord Jesus, as a Judge, will condemn the wicked; "he will come to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not his Gospel." But as a Priest, he will come forth only to bless his redeemed, who are praying without, whilst he is interceding for them within the vail^f. They are fitly represented as "looking for him;" and he will appear to their unutterable and eternal joy.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are regardless of their spiritual welfare—

[O that you would duly consider the certainty and nearness of death and judgment! You would then soon turn from vanity and sin, and labour to secure an interest in Christ. Let this subject then dwell upon your minds, till you are quickened by it to seek the Lord, and have obtained through him the remission of your sins.]

2. To those who are anxious to save their souls—

[If you really look to Christ to take away your sins, you need not be afraid of death and judgment. You may look forward to Christ's second coming, not with comfort only, but unspeakable delight. Stand then in this posture, looking for and hasting to that blessed day^g: if he tarry, wait for him; and in due time you shall hear from his lips that reviving sentence; "Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you."]

^f Luke i. 9, 10.

^g 2 Pet. iii. 12.

MMCCCVIII.

SEASONS OF PENITENCE RECOMMENDED.

Heb. x. 3. *In those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.*

IN the institutions of the Mosaic law, burthensome as they were, God consulted the best interests of his people. Repentance, faith, and obedience, were

inculcated in them all. The daily sacrifices and frequent ablutions were intended to shew them, that they stood in need of mercy and of spiritual renovation: and the authority with which they were enjoined, taught them, that their whole happiness depended on an entire submission to the will of God. Those ordinances had also a further use; which was, to lead the minds of all to the contemplation of mysteries, which should in due season be more fully revealed. They did not themselves convey any solid or lasting benefit: they were mere shadows, which indicated indeed a substance; but which would vanish away, when that substance should appear. This is the view given of the law in the passage before us. The Apostle says, “The law, having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then, would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers, once purged, should have had no more conscience of sins.” Hence it appears, that the most solemn institutions of the law, not excepting the sacrifices offered on the great day of annual expiation, were, in fact, no more than mere “remembrances of sins,” which could never be removed, but by that better Sacrifice which should in due time be offered.

But that we may have a fuller insight into this subject, I will endeavour more distinctly to shew,

I. For what end those annual remembrances of sins were enjoined—

Doubtless they were intended, as the whole of the Mosaic ritual also was, to separate the Jewish people more entirely from all the nations of the world. But they were more particularly designed,

1. To make them sensible of their need of a Saviour—

[Every offering had this tendency: no man could see his victim bleed, without seeing and acknowledging what was his own desert before God. But, if there had been no day of

annual expiation appointed, the people would have been ready to imagine that every offering which they had presented to God had actually taken away the sin for which it had been offered. To guard against this fatal error, a day was appointed annually for a more especial remembrance of their sins, and for a deeper humiliation of their souls before God on account of them. Thus they were taught that neither their repentances nor their sacrifices had really availed to put away their sins: for, if they had, there had been no occasion for a repetition of them. Moreover, the same ordinances being still appointed annually, and annually observed, they were made to feel, that not even these more solemn rites had been able to prevail for the expiation of sin; so that, in fact, the guilt contracted throughout their whole lives still abode upon their souls; no offerings, which they had ever presented, having been able to remove it. In the view of this, they were particularly required to "afflict their souls^a." And, in truth, this ordinance was well calculated to produce in them the deepest humiliation: for, having occasion every year to review their lives through the past year; and to add, as it were, the sum of their recent iniquities to the incalculable score that was against them in consequence of former transgressions; and being at the same time necessitated to see that nothing which they either had done, or could do, could cancel the smallest portion of their debt; they would, of necessity, be led to cry for mercy with the deepest contrition, and to acknowledge their need of that Saviour whom they were instructed to expect.]

2. To shew, then, the insufficiency of the legal sacrifices—

[Nothing could carry stronger conviction with it than this particular ordinance: for, if former sacrifices had prevailed, why should they be repeated? What occasion was there for the annual offerings, if the occasional ones had answered their full end? or why should the same sins be atoned for in a future year, which have been expiated in the present year, if the present expiation has been satisfactory and complete? Here, then, was the axe laid to the root of all self-righteous conceits. It was to no purpose that these ordinances were of Divine appointment; or that they were observed according to the strict letter of the law: they were never intended to serve as real expiations of sin; nor was the observance of them ever intended to form a justifying righteousness before God: they were intended only to shadow forth a Saviour, to whom all must look, and through whom all must be justified; and the very repetition of them was, in fact, not only a remembrance of

^a Lev. xvi. 29, 31.

the sins which rendered a Saviour necessary; but a pledge, that such a Saviour as they needed should in due time be sent them.]

3. To direct their eyes to that Great Sacrifice that should in due time be offered—

[In every sacrifice which was offered, they saw the Lord Jesus Christ exhibited before them: and were reminded, that in due time he should “come to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” They were informed, that there was to arise from the loins of Abraham, “a Seed, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed.” The Prophets Isaiah and Daniel had fully described the way in which the promised seed should effect the work assigned him: that he should “be cut off, but not for himself;” that he should be “wounded for our transgressions, and be bruised for our iniquities^b,” that he should “make his soul an offering for sin; and that in this way he should “finish transgression, and make an end of sin, and bring in an everlasting righteousness,” by which all the sinners of mankind, who should believe in him, should be “justified.” Now, all this was set before them; and was seen by them, with more or less distinctness, according to the faith they had in exercise: and in every sacrifice which, from year to year, was offered, they saw an herald sent, and heard his proclamation, “Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world!”]

That we may bring the matter more home to ourselves, let us consider,

II. What good may be expected from stated remembrances of sins amongst us—

It is granted, that nothing equivalent to the Mosaic ordinances is required of us. Yet, if we were to appoint stated seasons for ourselves—seasons for reviewing our past lives, and for special humiliation of our souls before God—I am persuaded we should find it highly conducive to our spiritual welfare. Such seasons would be useful,

1. For the deepening of our repentance—

[We are apt to lose, very speedily, the convictions which sin has fastened upon our mind. At first, perhaps, they are pungent, and cause considerable anguish; but in a little time the impression wears away, and we almost forget that we have

^b Isai. liii. 5, 6, 11. Dan. ix. 24.

sinned at all. But if we had stated seasons for calling our ways to remembrance, our past convictions would be revived, and our humiliation before God be greatly promoted. The sins of early life being thus from time to time set before us, and those of daily incursion being added to them, we should have juster views of our extreme unworthiness. The whole life would then appear to be, what in reality it is, one continued scene of iniquity. For want of such seasons of recollection, men view their sins as they do the heavens in a cloudy night, when they can see only here and there a star of greater magnitude, and at remote distances: whereas, if our self-examinations were strict, and our retrospect frequent, our lives would appear rather like the heavens in the clearest night, full of stars of a greater or lesser order, and so connected as scarcely to leave an interval between them. With such views of ourselves, our repentance would not be slight, partial, transient; but deep, universal, permanent.]

2. For the endearing of the Saviour to us—

[True is that saying, that “where much is forgiven, men will love much; and little, where little has been forgiven.” Now, if we be in the habit of bringing before our eyes the sins of our whole life, and of viewing them, even as God does, in the aggregate, how shall we adore that mercy of God that has been extended to us, and that love of Christ which he has evinced in giving himself for us! Verily, it will appear almost incredible that even God himself should be capable of such condescension and grace. This self-knowledge is at the root of the experience of the saints in heaven. Behold them all prostrate before the throne, and casting down their crowns at the Saviour’s feet; whilst they sing, “To Him that loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood.” *This* is the state of mind which self-knowledge has a tendency to generate: and if our seasons of humiliation were more deep and frequent, we should more resemble the glorified saints, both in the nature and in the expressions of our joy.]

3. For the augmenting of our vigilance against the recurrence of sin—

[It is a truth not generally considered, that the sins which more easily beset us in early life, continue, more or less, our besetting sins to the end of our days. Pride, envy, wrath, malice, lewdness, covetousness, rarely leave the soul of which they have once got an undisturbed possession. Now, if a person has been in the habit of self-examination from year to year, and of seeing by what temptations chiefly he has been overcome, he will know the better against what he needs more especially to watch: he will have seen, how, on many

occasions, that, which, if resisted in the first moment, might have been easily overcome, has, by being harboured in the mind, acquired an ascendant over him, and defied his utmost efforts to subdue it. He will have seen, especially, how he has been betrayed, by unwatchfulness, into sins to which he had no natural propensity; and that there is not an evil in the human heart against which he has not reason to watch and pray. In a word, he will feel the need of committing himself wholly to the guidance of his God, and of crying continually, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."]

From this subject, then, we may LEARN,

1. What use to make of the present season^c—

[There are seasons which seem to claim somewhat more than an ordinary regard. The commencement of a new year, or the return of our natal day, may well lead us to a review of the past year, and consequently of our whole lives: and, were it so improved, how far more profitable should we find the season, than if it were spent in carnal mirth! I may add, too, how important is this suggestion in reference to eternity! Thousands go into the eternal world without having ever, in their whole lives, devoted one single day to the revision of their lives, and to humiliation for their sins. God forbid, my brethren, that you should be of that unhappy number! Let me recommend it to you all to begin, this day, to call your ways to remembrance; to enter minutely into the sins of your early youth, and of every succeeding year, even to the present hour. Let me recommend you to mark, not merely the sins of greater enormity, but those which the world accounts slight and venial. Let me recommend to you to notice the sins of *omission*, as well as of *commission*; and the sins of *defect*, as well as those of utter neglect. Could you be prevailed upon to take such a retrospect, it could not fail of being attended with the best consequences to your spiritual edification in this life, and to your eternal welfare in the life to come.]

2. What especially to aim at, in all the exercises of your souls—

[There is a frame of mind peculiarly characteristic of the advanced Christian: and which, I conceive, is suggested by the considerations of my text. You have seen that the most pious of God's people, no less than others, were to observe a day in every year for the special purpose of remembering their past sins, and of afflicting their souls on account of them; whilst, at the same time, they were to renew their applications to God

^c It would be a proper subject for *New-Year's Day* or *Lent*, or a *Fast Day*, or *Birth Day*,

for mercy through the appointed sacrifices. A sense of sin was not to weaken their hope of God's mercy, on the one hand; nor was their confidence in God's mercy to weaken their sense of sin, on the other hand: both were to be retained in constant and united exercise; that so, whilst they "rejoiced with trembling," they might tremble with rejoicing. Now, this is a state of mind by no means so common as might be wished. The generality of Christians, if they could feel towards God as a loving, obedient, and devoted spouse towards her husband, would conceive that they had attained the highest state of which they are capable. But, to make that image fully suited to our case, we must suppose the spouse to have been originally taken from the lowest and most degraded state by her husband; and, after her union with him, to have dishonoured him, and debased herself, by the grossest enormities. We must further suppose her husband to have followed her with the most affectionate entreaties to return to him; to have assured her of his most entire forgiveness; and, having prevailed on her to return, to be exercising towards her all imaginable kindness, without ever once uttering a single word of upbraiding. Now, suppose her to become faithful and obedient, and you will have a juster conception of the Christian's state. Though her husband has forgiven her, can you imagine that she has forgiven herself? On the contrary, does not every act of love on her husband's part fill her with deeper humility and self-abhorrence, for having ever acted so basely towards one of so exalted a character? Does not her whole intercourse with him, from day to day, augment her admiration of him, and her loathing of herself? Yes; though forgiven, she never for a moment forgets what she is, or what she deserves: and her whole soul is prostrate before God and man, even in the midst of her fondest endearments or her sublimest joys. Here is the Christian character: here is the character which I wish you all to attain. Do not mistake; you need not rush into gross sins in order to have a foundation for it: the adulteries of every one of you are manifest enough, without any fresh iniquities: you need only see how you have treated your divine Husband, and what base lusts you have harboured in your bosoms, from your youth up even until now, and you will see that you have need to "walk softly before God all your days," and to "lothe yourselves before him in dust and ashes." This is "walking humbly with God." This will not abate either your confidence or your joy: but it will temper the one with fear, and the other with contrition.]

MMCCCIX.

CHRIST SUPERSEDING THE LEGAL SACRIFICES.

Heb. x. 5—10. *When he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt-offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

THERE is not any important truth contained in the New Testament, which was not before revealed in the Old. But we have an advantage over the Jews, in that the obscurity, which was cast over the language of prophecy, is removed by the interpretations of men divinely inspired to explain the sacred oracles. Hence we are enabled to see, what the Jews could never comprehend, though plainly and repeatedly declared to them, God's determination to abrogate the Mosaic economy, in order to make way for the Christian dispensation. This was declared by David, while the law was yet in full force: and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews both quotes his words in proof of this point, and confirms them by additional declarations to the same effect.

We shall consider,

I. The quotation as explained by the Apostle—

In his comment on David's words the Apostle throws great light upon,

1. What is expressed in them—

The Psalm beyond all doubt refers to Christ: for it was not possible that David should boast of his own obedience as superseding the law; since a compliance with the law constituted a very essential part of his duty. If it be thought that what is spoken in ver. 12. is adverse to this construction, it

must be remembered that the sins of the whole world were Christ's by imputation^a; and therefore they might justly draw from him that complaint.

In the Psalm David speaks in the person of Christ, whom he represents as addressing the Father to this effect: '*Thou didst never design the legal sacrifices to take away sin; that office thou hast assigned to me: and I have most willingly undertaken it, nor will ever relinquish my services till I have completed all that I have undertaken.*'

That the sacrifices were never ordained to take away sin is plain, from the contempt poured upon them by God himself *in comparison of moral duties*^b; yes, and *absolutely too*, if unaccompanied with suitable dispositions in the offerers^c.

That Christ was sent into the world for that end appears also from the very first promise made to man, that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head"^d.

That he willingly undertook the office is declared by David much more strongly than in the passage *as quoted* by the Apostle. In the passage *as quoted in my text*, it is merely said, "I come to do thy will, O God:" but in the Psalm it is written, "Lo, I come; *I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea thy law is within my heart.*" All which additional expressions shew the zeal with which Christ undertook our cause, and executed the arduous work that was assigned him.

That he would never relinquish it till it was accomplished was also strongly declared in those words, "Mine ears thou hast opened," which refer to the custom of boring the ear of a servant who refused to be liberated at the day of release, and engaged to abide for ever in his master's service^e. The Apostle, in citing the passage, varies it in words, though he adheres to it in sense. He says, "A body hast thou prepared me;" that is, It was necessary to the completion of my undertaking, that I should have somewhat to offer in sacrifice; and therefore thou hast prepared for me a body in the womb of a pure virgin, that being free from the taint and corruption transmitted to all the posterity of Adam, it might be fit to be offered in sacrifice for the sins of the whole world^f.

But, to the inconceivable advantage of the Church, the Apostle brings forth from David's words,]

2. What is implied in them—

[Here we see the benefit of having an inspired commentator on the Old Testament. No Jew could have conceived

^a Isai. liii. 6.

^b 1 Sam. xv. 22. Hos. vi. 6.

^c Isai. i. 11—14. and lxvi. 3.

^d Gen. iii. 15.

^e Exod. xxi. 5, 6.

^f The Apostle's meaning is precisely expressed, Phil. ii. 6—8.

all that was designed to be revealed in these words: but we are informed by God himself, that "when it was said, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God," *it was designed to intimate, that all the legal sacrifices should be swept away, and the whole Jewish economy be superseded by the Christian dispensation: "HE TAKETH AWAY THE FIRST, THAT HE MAY ESTABLISH THE SECOND."* This was an explanation of God's *hidden purpose*, an explanation, which no uninspired man could have dared to offer. But in several other parts of this epistle are similar explanations given, and not in a way of conjecture, but of authoritative declaration. Thus, from the mention of a *new* covenant which God would make with his people, the Apostle infers, "In that he saith, A *new* covenant; he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away^g." In another place, having cited God's declaration that, to those who laid hold on that covenant, their sins and iniquities he would remember no more, he draws this inference; "Now where remission of sins is, there is no more offering for sin; and consequently all the Jewish sacrifices are swept away^h. Again, in another place having cited the words of the Prophet Haggai, "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven," he says, "This word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things which are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remainⁱ."

Thus we have obtained a deep insight into the recondite meaning of our text, and may with confidence proceed to consider,

II. His declaration founded upon it—

There are two important points which the Apostle deduces from these words of David; namely, that salvation flows,

1. From God's will as *the source*—

[Sanctification imports a setting apart of any thing for God. Hence the tabernacle with all its vessels are said to have been sanctified^k; and Christ himself says, "For their sakes I sanctify myself^l:" and it is in this sense that the term "sanctified" is used in the text^m: it means a separation for God, in order to eternal salvation.

Now it is solely from the "will of God" thus made known to his Son, and thus fulfilled by him, that any of the children of men are made partakers of salvation. It was not possible

^g Heb. viii. 8, 13.

^h Heb. x. 17, 18.

ⁱ Heb. xii. 26, 27.

^k Exod. xl. 10—12.

^l John xvii. 19.

^m Comp. ver. 14.

for any such plan to have originated with any other than God himself. When God's dealings with the fallen angels were considered, who would have imagined that man, partaking of their iniquity, should yet be rescued from their doom? Supposing that such a thought could have entered into the mind of man, who could have contrived such a way of maintaining the honour of the Divine government, and of making the discordant attributes of justice and mercy to harmonize in the salvation of man? If such an expedient as the substitution of God's own Son in the place of sinners could have been devised, who could have dared to propose it to the Deity; or have prevailed upon him to acquiesce in it? The more this is considered, the more will the salvation of man appear to be totally independent of man himself (as far as respects the contriving or the meriting of it), and to be the fruit of infinite wisdom, sovereign grace, and unbounded loveⁿ. From the first laying of the foundation to the bringing forth of the top-stone, we must cry, Grace, grace unto it^o.]

2. From Christ's sacrifice as *the means*—

[It might seem that men, under the law, were accepted on account of the sacrifices, which were offered according to the Mosaic ritual. But, not to mention the impossibility that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin^p, the very repetition of those sacrifices shewed their insufficiency for the removal of guilt, or for the satisfying of men's consciences^q. They had no effect but as they led the offerers to the Lord Jesus Christ, or expressed their faith in his all-atoning sacrifice. All who have ever found acceptance with God, whether before the law, or under it, or since its abolition, have been admitted to mercy purely "through the one offering of Jesus Christ." Nothing but that could ever satisfy Divine justice; nothing but that could ever atone for one single sin: nor can any creature, to the end of the world, ever obtain favour with God, but in consideration of that sacrifice presented to God for us, and pleaded by us as the one ground of our hope^r. Here I cannot but call your attention to the minuteness and force of David's statement, and to the *redoubled* force and energy expressed in the Apostle's citation of it. David enumerates the different kinds of sacrifices, in order to shew, that none (whether those burnt without the camp^s, or those consumed on the altar^t, or those of which but a small part was burnt, and the rest was divided between the priest and the offerer^u)

ⁿ 2 Tim. i. 9.

^o Zech. iv. 6, 7.

^p ver. 4.

^q ver. i. 3. Heb. ix. 9.

^r Acts iv. 12. 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^s Lev. xvi. 27.

^t Exod. xxix. 38—42.

^u Lev. vii. 1—6, 19. The word "*all*" includes the offerers. See Lev. vii. 15, 16. and Numb. xviii. 11.

were of any avail to take away sin. And *twice does the Apostle repeat* this enumeration of them, in order the more abundantly to manifest the eternal purpose of God to liberate us from the Jewish yoke, and to establish throughout the world the purer dispensation of the Gospel; so that all, whether Jews or Gentiles, should henceforth “know nothing as a ground of hope, but Jesus Christ and him crucified.”]

INFER—

1. How vain is men’s confidence in any services of their own!

[To have been baptized in our infancy, to have attended punctually the outward duties of the Sabbath, and to have waited occasionally upon the Lord at his table, are deemed in general satisfactory evidences of our conversion to God, and sufficient grounds for our hope towards him. But, if the whole multitude of legal institutions, framed by God’s own order, and according to a model shewn to Moses in the mount, were of no value as recommending men to God, how much less can the few services which we perform be sufficient to procure us acceptance with him? But it may be said, that moral services are more pleasing to God than ceremonial: true; but we are not told that God willed *them*, any more than the others, *as means of effecting our reconciliation with him*. It was the incarnation and death of Christ that God “willed;” and, in a remarkable correspondence with the text, he thrice, by an audible voice from heaven, said, This is my beloved Son, *in whom I am well pleased*^x. Let every self-righteous hope then be banished; and let us learn to glory in Christ alone^y.]

2. What encouragement have all to devote themselves to God through Christ!

[We have the united testimony of Prophets and Apostles that God willeth the salvation of men through the sacrifice of his own Son, and that Christ as willingly offered himself a sacrifice in order to effect their salvation. What more can be wanted but that we go to God in that new and living way, which is so clearly pointed out to us? We can have no doubt of God’s willingness to save, or of the sufficiency of that salvation which he has provided for us. Let nothing then keep us back from God: but let us look to Christ as the propitiation for our sins^z, and plead the merit of his all-atoning blood. Thus, sanctifying ourselves in his name, we shall be

^x Οὐκ ἐνδόκησας, ver. 8. with ἐν ᾧ ἐνδόκησα. Matt. iii. 17.

^y Gal. vi. 14.

^z 1 John ii. 2.

perfected before God^a; being sanctified also by the Holy Ghost, we shall be acceptable in the sight of God and our Father for ever and ever^b.]

^a ver. 14. with Heb. ix. 12.

^b Rom. xv. 16.

MMCCCX.

THE PERFECTION OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE.

Heb. x. 14—17. *By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord^a, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*

IT is a favourite sentiment with some, that we need not study any thing but the four Gospels, in order to attain a complete view of our holy religion. But whilst I acknowledge, that a person who studies the four Gospels may certainly learn the way of salvation from them, I must add, that his views of Christianity will of necessity be very imperfect, if he do not avail himself of the further light which is afforded him in the epistles. To what purpose has the Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, written so argumentatively on the subject of justification by faith alone, if we do not derive from his statement a fuller knowledge of that fundamental doctrine, than we could have acquired without it? And who will say that he could have attained from the Gospels, or even from the Mosaic law itself, such clear views of the priestly office of Christ as are set before us in the Epistle to the Hebrews? There the parallel between his and the Aaronic priesthood is drawn to our hands, and the superiority of his is pointed out with a fulness and precision which no uninspired man could ever have attained. The tabernacle in which the Levitical priests ministered was glorious; but Christ's was more glorious, being not made with hands, even his own sacred body. *They*

^a If λέγει Κύριος be translated, *The Lord saith*, the connexion with what follows will make the passage incomparably more clear.

were appointed to their office by a command; *he*, with an oath; *they* entered into a holy place on earth; *he*, into heaven itself; *they*, with the blood of beasts; *he*, with his own blood. *Their* sacrifices purified the patterns of heavenly things; *his*, the heavenly things themselves: *theirs*, legally, the flesh; *his*, really, the conscience. *Their* priests were only priests; *he*, a Priest to God, and a Testator to us. *They* offered often; *he*, only once: *they* stood; *he* sits: *they* offered for themselves first; *he*, for us only: *they* entered the vail to come forth again; *he*, never to come forth till he shall come to judge the world: *they* obtained a temporary remission of some sins; *he*, an everlasting remission of all sin.

It is in this last view that his office is spoken of in the passage before us. The Aaronic priests offered often because their offerings could never take away sin: but he, "by his one offering, hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified: whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us."

The peculiar solemnity with which his asseveration is here confirmed, even by an appeal to God himself, will lead me to consider,

I. The truth attested—

A more important truth than this can scarcely be conceived; it is, that Christ's one offering has done that which all the Levitical sacrifices never could have done; it has procured for all who trust in it a full and perfect and everlasting remission of all their sins. But,

Let us notice this truth as contrasted with the ordinances of the Mosaic law—

[The Levitical sacrifices were renewed from year to year, because of their inefficiency: but Christ's was offered only once, because it completely answered every end for which it was designed. The Levitical sacrifices perfected no man, either as to his acceptance before God, or as to the peace of his own soul: as far as they had any efficacy, they prevailed only for a year; and then must be repeated, in order to obtain a further remission: but Christ's sacrifice rendered men perfect, both before God and in their own consciences. God was so satisfied

with it, that he has nothing more to demand at the hands of those who trust in it: He considers it as a full discharge of all that the law requires of us, and a full price for all that our souls can need either in time or eternity. And the sinner who looks to it may well be satisfied, since God himself is satisfied, and all the demands of law and justice are satisfied. Thus, all who are “sanctified” to the service of their God, whatever their past sins may have been, are perfected, and that for ever: sins of the deepest die are purged by this sacrifice; and “*all* who believe in it, are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.”]

In this view, what a glorious truth it is!

[How *honourable to Christ!* how *consoling to us!* As it respects the Lord Jesus Christ, it shews how completely he has effected all which he came into the world to do. “He has made an end of sin, and made reconciliation for iniquity;” and “obtained eternal redemption for us.” Nothing is wanting to complete his work: his one offering has effected all. As it respects us, we have in Christ’s sacrifice all that we can desire. When once we recollect who he is, not man only, but God manifest in the flesh: when we recollect the covenant-engagements entered into between his Father and him; he on his part undertaking to make atonement for sin; and the Father undertaking to accept it in our behalf: when we recollect that he has been raised from the dead in proof of his having fulfilled all his engagements; and that he is now invested with all power in heaven and in earth to impart to sinners the blessings he has purchased for them: what can we want more? The soul acquiesces in this mysterious appointment, and confidently relies upon it, assured, that, if salvation is not to be found in him, it is not to be found at all.]

This truth being attested by the Holy Ghost, let us consider,

II. The testimony adduced—

The witness to this truth is no other than “the Holy Ghost”—

[“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God:” and whether the writers of it were Prophets or Apostles, “they all spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” Throughout the whole Scripture, too, that Divine Spirit has one great object, which is, to testify of Christ. By the prophets he testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and of the glory that should follow. Indeed, “the testimony of Jesus was the spirit of prophecy” throughout^b, and in this light we should

^b Rev. xix. 10.

regard all that the prophets have written. We should consider their words, not merely as the words of the Holy Ghost, but as a testimony given by the Holy Ghost, in order to shew us what we should believe respecting the Lord Jesus, and to increase our faith in him. And, whatever his testimony be, we should give the most implicit credit to it, adoring him for his wonderful goodness in thus condescending to teach the inquiring, and to confirm the doubting, soul. On this occasion,]

His testimony is most convincing—

[The passage cited by the Apostle, is taken from the prophecies of Jeremiah^c. He has before cited it in a preceding chapter^d. There it is adduced more at length, in order to shew that the Jews under the Mosaic dispensation were taught to look forward to a new covenant, and to regard their own as waxing old. In the passage before us, a smaller portion of it only is adduced, in order to mark in a peculiar manner the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Its force will be best seen by contrasting it with the provisions made for the forgiveness of sin under the Mosaic dispensation. There was no actual forgiveness of sins obtained by the sacrifices which the law prescribed: they were pardoned, so to speak, for a year only; at the expiration of which time, the same sacrifices were to be again offered, in order to the obtaining of a protracted pardon. Thus the very sacrifices which were offered for sin, were rather a remembrance of sins than a real expiation of them; so that the conscience of the sinner was never relieved from a sense of guilt, and never brought to the enjoyment of solid peace. But, under that very dispensation, the Holy Ghost testified, that provision was made by the new covenant, for the full and everlasting remission of all sin, since God expressly engaged, "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more:" and consequently no further sacrifice was wanted to be offered for them. This testimony comes exactly to the point. The Aaronic priests repeated annually the same sacrifices; because the sins for which they were offered, were still kept in remembrance by God: but, in consequence of the offering which Christ has made, the sins of those who believe in him shall "never be remembered:" and consequently, without any repetition of his sacrifice, his people are "perfected for ever," being brought into perfect peace with God, and perfect peace in their own consciences.]

Hence we see,

1. How amply the Scripture testifies of Christ!

^c Jer. xxxi. 31—34.

^d Heb. viii. 8—12.

[It is not merely of his Messiahship that the prophets speak: they enter fully into every part of his character, and work, and offices. There is not any thing which we are concerned to know respecting him, which is not revealed in the Old Testament. The revelation of him is indeed less clear than in the New Testament, but not a whit less glorious. When the true sense of the different passages is ascertained, there will be found truths, of which the superficial reader has no conception.]

Our blessed Lord says, "Search the Scriptures; for they are they that testify of me." And if we would fulfil that duty with care and diligence, and with earnest prayer to God for the teachings of his Spirit, we should find in the Scriptures an inexhaustible mine of wealth, and be enriched by them with all "the unsearchable riches of Christ^e."]

2. What loss they sustain who receive not its testimony!

[It is a lamentable fact, that the generality of Christians are looking out for some other offering to present to God, in order to effect their reconciliation with him. Every considerate person will sometimes put this question to himself, "Where-with shall I come before the Lord?" And the ignorant conceit of Balak is that which then presents itself to his mind; "Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" But if men read even the Jewish Scriptures with attention, they might see how erroneous such views were, and how vain such hopes. They would see that the new covenant, which has been ratified by the blood of Christ, prescribes a very different method of acceptance with God: they would see that the one offering of Christ is a sufficient propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and that all attempts to add to it are vain. Dear brethren, believe, I pray you, the witness of the Holy Ghost on this all-important subject. "Make not God himself a liar," as St. John expresses it, by denying or doubting this record. Be assured that he will not deceive you. If this were the testimony of a fallible man, you might well question it: but when Prophets and Apostles, all inspired by the Holy Ghost, concur in it, you should embrace it with your whole hearts, and rely upon it with your whole souls.]

3. How exalted are the privileges of every true believer!

[All who are interested in the one offering of Christ upon the cross, are “perfected for ever.” God has cast all their sins behind his back into the very depths of the sea. He has not only forgiven, but, if I may so speak, has forgotten, all their sins. They are blotted out as a morning cloud. True it is, that they still need the application of the same blood to their consciences, because they are yet compassed with infirmities, so that even their holy things need to be cleansed from the iniquity that cleaveth to them. They are like persons who have been washed in a bath; they are clean every whit; yet need they to wash their feet, because they contract defilement in walking even from the bath^f. But as to all their former sins, they are altogether blotted out of the book of God’s remembrance. Yet let it not therefore be supposed that they should be forgotten by us. No: they should be ever before us as a ground of humiliation, though not as a ground of fear: and the more assured we are that God is pacified towards us, the more should we lothe ourselves; and pant the more to “be sanctified wholly, in body, soul, and spirit.”]

^f John xiii. 8—10.

MMCCCXI.

THE WAY OF ACCESS TO GOD THROUGH THE VAIL.

Heb. x. 19—22. *Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, his flesh; and having an High-priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*

MAN, by the fall, lost that intercourse with God which he had maintained in his state of innocence. The intent of Christianity is to restore him to the enjoyment of his privilege. Hence the inspired writers urge the great doctrines of the Gospel, not merely as truths which are to be believed, but as motives which are to animate and direct our conduct. The author of this epistle has set forth at large the correspondence between our blessed Lord, and the typical representations which were given of him under the Mosaic law. He now proceeds to the

practical improvement of his subject. In the words before us he opens,

I. The grounds of our access to God—

They who are ignorant of their own extreme guilt and helplessness, imagine, that they can come to God without any mediator. But the Scriptures uniformly declare that the way of access to him is,

1. Through the atonement—

[The original way of access to God by the covenant of works was shut up for ever upon the first transgression. Nor does that typical way which was appointed under the law continue any longer. There is “a new way” now opened to us through the vail. The human nature of Christ was represented by the vail of the temple. At the very instant that his body expired upon the cross, the vail of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom^a. That being the precise time of the evening sacrifice, all the worshippers in the temple had a perfect view of the holy of holies. Thus an intimation was given to them, that, by the rending of Christ’s body, the way into the most holy place was opened indiscriminately to all. As the high-priest went into the typical sanctuary with the blood of the sacrifice, so might all from henceforth go into the very heaven of heavens, as it were, with the blood of Jesus. This way was now “consecrated for them” by Jesus himself. It was a *new* way, not only because it was different from that which had existed before, but because it should never wax old or vanish as the other had done^b. And it was a *living* way, because, while the former way prohibited access to all, except the high-priest, under the penalty of death, this infallibly imparts life to all who come to God in it.]

2. Through the intercession of Christ—

[The Church of God is that “house” which the temple of Solomon prefigured. In it God dwells in a more immediate manner than he ever did by the Shechinah upon the mercy-seat^c. Christ, as the great High-priest, presides over this house. He is gone with his own blood into the holy of holies^d. He is there sprinkling it on our behalf in the presence of his heavenly Father. There also is He offering the incense of his continual intercession. Under the law, the hopes of the Israelites were founded on the intercession of their high-priest. In vain was the sacrifice killed, if its blood was not carried within the vail: and in vain would it be

^a Matt. xxvii. 51.

^b Heb. viii. 13.

^c 2 Cor. vi. 16.

^d Heb. ix. 12.

carried thither, if it were not sprinkled before the mercy-seat, and accompanied with the clouds of incense. Thus not even the death of Christ is, of itself, a sufficient warrant for us to draw nigh to God. But his intercession added to it gives us boldness, and access with confidence^e. We may go to God upon this ground as to a reconciled father. Nor need any sinner whatever deem himself too unworthy to approach his throne. All are now constituted priests unto God^f. And all who bring the blood of Christ with them, and rely on his prevailing intercession, shall surely find acceptance with him.]

There is however something further which the worshippers of God must attend to, namely,

II. The manner in which we should approach him—

Christians are not to go to God with a rude and inconsiderate familiarity. They should consider the majesty of Him before whom they come; and should draw near to him with,

A sincere heart—

[To go before God and declare things which we neither feel nor believe, is to mock and insult him. If our confessions be without humility, our petitions without fervour, and our thanksgivings without gratitude, how is it possible that God should hear us? If we draw nigh to him with our lips while our hearts are far from him, we worship him in vain^g. To have imbibed true notions, is not sufficient. God requires truth in our inward parts^h. And they alone can worship him acceptably, who worship him in spirit and in truthⁱ.]

An assured faith—

[When we go to God in prayer, we should not doubt whether He be willing to accept us. We should be thoroughly persuaded that “Christ is the way, the truth, and the life^k,” and that he will save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him. To be assured of our own personal interest in him is not necessary. But we should have the most assured belief of the sufficiency of his atonement and intercession. Nor should we limit his power and grace under an idea of our own unworthiness. To ask with a doubtful mind, is to cast a reflection upon him at the very time that we are imploring his favour. And we are warned by God himself that such wavering petitions never shall prevail^l.]

^e Heb. vii. 25.

^f 1 Pet. ii. 9. Rev. i. 6.

^g Matt. xv. 8, 9.

^h Ps. li. 6.

ⁱ John iv. 24.

^k John xiv. 6.

^l Jam. i. 6, 7.

A good conscience—

[The conscience of every man has been more or less defiled. Nor could the offerings under the law perfect a man with respect to it^m. But the blood of Jesus will cleanse it from its defilementⁿ. And, if we heartily endeavour to keep it void of offence in future, we shall enjoy the testimony of a *good* conscience^o. But if we live in the habitual neglect of any duty, or the allowed commission of any sin, we shall have an *evil* and accusing conscience. It is necessary therefore that our hearts be purged from the guilt of sin by the sprinkling of Christ's blood, and from the love and practice of sin by his Spirit. Without this we can never approach God with comfort or acceptance. We shall stand self-condemned as hypocrites. And every petition we offer will appear a solemn mockery of God. We must therefore have our hearts purified from all habitual and allowed sin. Nor unless we have, can we hope for any answer of peace unto our souls^p.]

An holy conversation^q—

[As our inward principle must be pure, so must also our outward practice be. The priests washed their flesh before they went within the vail, to denote the purity which was required of them by God^r. Thus must we also be careful to possess that purity, if we would approach him with acceptance. Not that our sanctity of heart and life will procure us favour in his sight. The only grounds of our acceptance have been before stated. But there is a meetness for the enjoying of his benefits. And if we possess not that meetness, in vain shall we expect the benefits themselves.]

APPLICATION—

[Some may ask, What shall I do, seeing I possess not these requisites? Shall I stay away from the throne of grace entirely? We answer, No; if we cannot ask as we ought, we should ask as we can. God will assist us if we endeavour to serve him aright; and will impart to us those holy dispositions, that shall qualify us for the reception of his richest blessings. Let us then thankfully improve the liberty he has afforded us. Let us see the vail now rent asunder, and behold our God upon his mercy-seat. Behold, his address to every

^m Heb. ix. 9.ⁿ Heb. ix. 14.^o 2 Cor. i. 12.^p Prov. xxviii. 9. Ps. lxvi. 18.^q The last clause of the text might properly begin the next verse; in which case it must be referred to our baptismal washing, and the solemn engagements consequent upon it.^r Lev. xvi. 4.

one of us is, Draw nigh to me, and I will draw nigh to you; cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded^s. In obedience to his command, let us surround his throne with fervent importunity. Let us ask for mercy and grace to help us in every time of need^t; and so open our mouths wide before him that He may fill and satisfy us with good things^u. Thus shall we enjoy the sweetest fellowship with him in this world; and shortly be admitted to his more immediate presence in the world to come.]

^s Jam. iv. 8.^t Heb. iv. 16.^u Ps. lxxxi. 10.

MMCCCXII.

STEADFASTNESS AND ACTIVITY IN GOD'S SERVICE INCULCATED.

Heb. x. 23—25. *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

CHRISTIANS in general do not sufficiently advert to Christian principles as a ground of action. Whilst they acknowledge their obligation to serve God, they lose sight of those considerations which alone can render his yoke easy, and his burthen light. They bear in mind that Christ offered himself a sacrifice for sin; but they forget, that his priestly office, which was but in part executed on earth, is still carrying on in heaven. Were this duly contemplated, it would afford a stimulus to exertion which nothing else can give. In the fourth chapter of this epistle, the Apostle urges it as a motive to steadfastness in our most holy profession: "Seeing then that we have a great High-priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession^a." In the passage before us he repeats the same glorious truth, and grounds upon it, not only the same exhortation, but an exhortation to various other duties connected with it. What these

^a Heb. iv. 14.

duties are, it is my intention at this time to point out.

Consider then,

I. Our duty as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ^b—

It is our duty to profess openly our faith and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ—

[We are not to be contented with exercising faith in him as our Saviour: we must confess him also before men: for, if “with the heart we believe unto righteousness, it is with the mouth that confession must be made unto salvation^c.” But,]

This profession we must “hold fast without wavering”—

[The more we make our light to shine before men, the more will those who “love darkness, rather than light” oppose us — — — Nothing will be left untried to divert us from our purpose. Persuasion, derision, menaces, will all be used in their turn: and all manner of influence will be brought to bear upon us, if by any means we may be prevailed upon to renounce what the world calls our enthusiasm and folly. But we must “hold fast our profession,” whatever efforts be made to wrest it from us: we must hold it fast “without wavering.” There must be no inclination of the mind towards the ways we have forsaken, or the society we have left: “We must forget our own people and our father’s house, if we would that our heavenly Bridegroom should have pleasure in our beauty^d.” We must “hate father and mother, and even our own lives,” in comparison of Christ^e. There must be in us a determination of heart to “follow the Lord fully,” and at all events; even though we be threatened with scourging and imprisonment, as the Apostles were^f; or with a cruel death, as were Daniel and the Hebrew Youths^g. As for those vain reasonings by which men endeavour to justify their departure from God, they must not be entertained for one moment — — — Our whole life and conversation should proclaim “whose we are, or whom we serve.” We should be “shining as lights in the world;” and be as “epistles of Christ, known and read of all men.”]

Connected with our duty to Christ as his followers, is,

II. Our duty as members of his mystical body—

^b Some copies read ἐλπίδος instead of πίστεως; but they both amount to the same, hope being the offspring of faith.

^c Rom. x. 10.

^d Ps. xlv. 10, 11.

^e Luke xiv. 26, 27.

^f Acts iv. 19, 20.

^g Dan. iv. 18. and vi. 10.

We are "not to put our light under a bushel or a bed." When once we become united to Christ by faith, we become members of the body, of which he is the Head. To that body we from henceforth have duties, even as the members of our corporeal frame have to the body of which they constitute a part. With that body we are to unite, both in its public and social meetings, and not by withdrawing ourselves from it, to shew an indifference to its welfare. Some there were, even in the Apostle's days, who, through cowardice or worldly-mindedness, forsook the assemblies of the Church: and some there are who do so at the present day. But whatever vain excuses they may offer for their conduct, they grossly neglect their duty, which is, to edify, as far as they are able, every member of Christ's mystical body. This all are bound to do,

1. In a way of mutual inspection—

[We should "consider one another:" we should notice each other's wants and weaknesses, defects and failings, in order to guard each other against the very beginnings of declension in the divine life, and to stimulate one another to exertion in the cause of truth and love. We should mark also one another's abilities and opportunities for serving God, in order that the energies of all may be employed to the best effect. The members of our natural body, if attempting to execute offices for which they are not fitted, can effect little; but, when exerting themselves in their appropriate sphere, they all contribute to the general good. Thus should all the members of the Church seek out for themselves, and assign to each other, such offices as they are best qualified to perform; that, each labouring in his proper vocation, ("he that ministereth, for instance, or teacheth, or exhorteth, or giveth, or ruleth," in the due discharge of their respective duties^h;) the whole body may be edified, and God's name be glorified.]

2. In a way of mutual excitation—

[Love, both in its feelings and actings, is apt to languish, if it be not watched, and cherished, and quickened to activity, from time to time. "This gift of God that is in us, needs to be stirred up," and fanned to a flame, by mutual exhortations. Hence we are told to "provoke one another unto love and to good works." No member of the body should be idle: there

^h Rom. xii. 7, 8.

are some good works which all may perform: and all should be penetrated with a desire to do what they can. It is by the unwearied exertion of all their powers that the designs of God are to be accomplished, both in the Church and in the world. But, as all are apt to be remiss, all should exhort and animate one another, and, “so much the more as we see the day approaching.” The final destruction of Jerusalem was very near at hand when this epistle was written: and that period would be most afflictive to the Church who fled to the mountains, as well as to those who abode in the city: and therefore they all needed to prepare for that trial, and to labour with redoubled zeal for the Lord, whilst an opportunity of serving him was afforded them. And to us also, there is a day of trial near at hand, even the day of death, and of our appearing before God in judgment. Then all our opportunities of serving and honouring God will be terminated for ever. O how diligent then should we be in redeeming the present time, and in labouring whilst it is day; seeing that the night, when no man can work, is so near at hand! To impress these thoughts on each other’s minds, and to stimulate one another to activity in the consideration of them, is our bounden duty: and whatever we may imagine about serving God acceptably in secret, whilst we neglect these public and social duties, we shall find ourselves awfully mistaken, when God shall call us to account for “hiding our talent in a napkin.”]

Such being our duties to Christ and his Church, let us notice,

III. Our encouragement to perform both the one and the other—

God is faithful to his promises—

[Great, “exceeding great and precious are the promises” which he has given us in his word; promises suited to every state in which every member can be placed. In the covenant of grace they are all contained, even in that covenant of which Christ is the Mediator and Surety: and “in Christ they are all yea and amen, to the glory of our covenant-God and Fatherⁱ.” Not one of them shall ever fail of accomplishment: for “God is not a man, that he should lie, or the son of man, that he should repent.” Indeed “he has confirmed his promises with an oath, that, by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong consolation.” The experience of all ages attests this blessed truth, that God is faithful to his promises. Joshua’s appeal to all Israel, at the

ⁱ 1 Cor. i. 20.

close of his long-protracted life and warfare, may be made also to every child of Abraham; "Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you; and not one thing hath failed thereof^k."]

This consideration may well animate us to the performance of all our duties—

[If no promises had been given us, we might well have been discouraged: for who could "engage in such an unequal warfare at his own charges?" In like manner, if the promises had been less extensive, or less free, we might well despond; because we could have never merited the performance of them, nor ever have supplied what might be lacking in them. Moreover, if there had been any room to question God's fidelity, we should still have been equally far from any solid comfort. But when we find the promises so perfectly free, that all are at liberty to lay hold upon them; and so full, that they extend to every possible want; and so sure, that sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of them shall fail; do we not feel encouraged to embrace them, and to rely upon them, and to plead them, and to go forth in the strength of them to serve our God? Is not this one word, "My grace is sufficient for thee," a full warrant for undertaking any service, or for meeting any trial, to which God may call us? May we not boldly say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me?"

Here then is our encouragement to perform our duties to Christ and his Church. Whatever we may have to encounter for Christ's sake, we may, in reliance upon his word, "hold fast our profession;" and whatever exertion may be necessary for filling up our respective offices as members of his body, we may labour and not faint; assured that, if we be "steadfast, and unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord^l."]

WHAT THEN SHALL I SAY MORE? Is God faithful to his engagements? Then,

1. Be ye faithful to yours—

[If you have given up yourselves to him as his purchased possession, then have ye bound yourselves to "glorify him with your bodies and your spirits which are his." Remember then the vows that are upon you; those which were made for you in your baptism; those which you took upon yourselves at

^k Josh. xxiii. 14.

^l 1 Cor. xv. 58.

your confirmation; and those which you have renewed at the table of the Lord. Labour diligently to perform them all; and not only to perform your own promises, but to stir up others to the performance of theirs also. Do not think to say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" for you have a duty to all the members of Christ's mystical body; and you are as much bound to perform that, as to perform any other whatever. Address yourselves then to the work of the Lord; and "whatever your hand findeth to do, do it with all your might." If you meet with difficulties and trials, be not discouraged, but go on boldly in the name and strength of the Lord. Draw not back on any account: for, "if any man draw back, God will have no pleasure in him." "He only who endureth to the end shall be saved." "Look to yourselves then, that ye lose not the things which ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward^m." "Be faithful unto death; and God will give you a crown of life."

2. Live by faith upon the promises—

[It is "by the promises that ye have already been made partakers of a divine natureⁿ;" and "by them must ye cleanse yourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God^o." Lay hold then on the promises: search them out with care: plead them before God with earnestness: and expect the accomplishment of them with confident assurance. This is the great secret of living unto God. This will keep up a continual intercourse between God and the soul. This will bring down Omnipotence to your aid. This will make every trial light, and every duty easy. This will enable you to defy all your enemies, and to challenge them all, whether individually or collectively, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ^p?" This will render you blessings to others, as well as blessed in your own souls: for those who behold your light, will "thank God, and take courage," and be emboldened to serve God with increased alacrity themselves. Thus too you will be prepared for "the day that is approaching:" for whilst the idle and unprofitable servant will be "cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth," the active and faithful servant will receive the plaudits of his Divine Master, and will "enter into the joy of his Lord."]

^m 2 John, ver. 8

^o 2 Cor. vii. 1.

ⁿ 2 Pet. i. 4.

^p Rom. viii. 35—39.

MMCCCXIII.

THE EVIL AND DANGER OF APOSTASY.

Heb. x. 26—31. *If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses : of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace ? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me ; I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

WE cannot be too strongly on our guard against attaching ourselves to human systems in religion. The partisans of human systems take a partial view of the Scriptures, leaning invariably to those passages which appear to sanction their favourite dogmas, and excluding all mention of those which have a contrary aspect. They all take it for granted, that the things which they know not how to reconcile, are contrary to, and inconsistent with, each other. But as in a machine wheels may move in opposite directions, and yet so harmonize as to subserve one common end, so, in the word of God, truths, which have an opposite aspect, may be perfectly reconcileable to each other, and equally conducive to the accomplishment of the Divine purposes. The Apostle Paul insisted, as strongly as any one could do, on the doctrines of grace, shewing that all was ordered by God according to the counsel of his own will : yet no Apostle spoke more strongly than he on the danger of apostasy ; or taught more forcibly the necessity of continual watchfulness on our part in order to the attainment of those blessings which God had from all eternity prepared for us. It is on this subject that he is speaking in the passage before us ; wherein he cautions the Hebrew converts against apostasy,

bidding them to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering; and warning them, that, if they turned back from God, it would be to their everlasting perdition.

In the words which I have just read, he sets forth,
I. The evil of apostasy—

It is not of all sin, or even of all wilful sin, that he speaks: for, if there were no pardon for wilful sin after baptism, or after we have embraced the Gospel, who could hope ever to attain salvation, since there is not a man in the universe who has not, on some one occasion at least, knowingly and wilfully done what he ought not, or left undone what he ought to have done. The sin spoken of in the text, is, a total and wilful apostasy from the Gospel of Christ. This appears from the whole context, both from that which precedes, and that which follows. In the preceding context he bids them to “hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering;” and then he adds, “*for*, if we sin wilfully;” that is, by renouncing our holy profession, we reduce ourselves to the most awful condition that can be imagined; seeing that, having put away all affiance in the sacrifice of Christ, there remains no other sacrifice for our sins. In the following context the sin is opened at large under three separate heads, which, whilst they mark distinctly the nature of the sin which is intended, display the evil of it in most tremendous colours.

Let us consider each of them in its order—

[Apostasy, he tells us, is a “treading under foot the Son of God.” The Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, came down from heaven to seek and to save them that were lost. We, when we are baptized in his name, or make a profession of faith in him, acknowledge him before all to be the Saviour of the world. All other lords we then renounce; and all other grounds of hope before God; and in effect we say with Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life: and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God^a.” But when we renounce our faith in

^a John vi. 68, 69.

him, we, as far as in us lies, cast him down from his throne, and trample him under our feet; declaring, that he is unworthy of the honour which we had erroneously put upon him, and that we will "no longer have him to reign over us:" yea, we even "crucify him afresh, and put him to an open shame^b."

Next, it is a "counting of the blood of the covenant an unholy thing." The Mosaic covenant was ratified with blood; and with that blood both the tabernacle with all its vessels, and the people who worshipped before it, were sanctified, and set apart as holy to the Lord^c. The covenant of grace is ratified with the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; and, when we "come to the knowledge of the truth," we also are sanctified with it, and set apart to the service of our God. We profess to consider that blood as the one procuring cause of all that we either have or hope for: and we look for all the blessings of the covenant solely through the merit of his blood as shed for us, and as sprinkled on us. But, when we cast off our profession, we declare before all, that we consider the blood of Christ as having no virtue at all as an atonement for sin, and as being, in fact, of no more efficacy than the blood of bulls and goats, or even of a malefactor, justly put to death.

Further, it is a doing of "despite unto the Spirit of grace." The Holy Spirit, both before and after the death of Jesus, bare witness to him by signs and wonders innumerable: and, when we are brought to the knowledge of the truth, it is by that same blessed Spirit illuminating our minds, and sealing the truth with power upon our souls. But, when we renounce the truth we have received, we insult that Divine Agent, as having borne witness to a falsehood: and we ascribe all his miracles either to Satanic agency, or to some mysterious imposture. We even laugh also at the impressions which he has made upon our minds, and deride all his merciful suggestions as fanaticism and delusion.]

In this view of apostasy, say, if it be not a most tremendous evil?

[Those who are guilty of it, speak of it only as a change of sentiment resulting from conviction; and thus they take credit to themselves as having grown in wisdom, and been faithful to their convictions. But God seeth not as man seeth. God beholds all the evils of the heart which have been accessary to this change; and all the injury that results from it, both to his honour, and to the world at large. He sees the pride of heart which will not receive the truth upon his testimony. He sees the love of the world which operates to draw the heart from him; yea, and the enmity of the heart against

^b Heb. vi. 6.

^c Heb. ix. 18—21.

him, which will not submit, either to be saved or governed in so mysterious a way. In other sins he beholds only a resistance to his authority; but in this, a contempt of all the wonders of his wisdom and love. A person who has never received the knowledge of the truth, cannot commit this sin, or any sin of equal malignity. It is the resisting of light that has been imparted, and the acting contrary to it to such an extent as to call it darkness; this it is which makes the guilt so great, that, humanly speaking, it can never be forgiven. Were it indeed repented of, and were mercy sought through the blood of Jesus, even this sin, great as it is, might be forgiven: but the commission of it implies such desperate wickedness and obduracy, that it never can, without a miracle of mercy, be repented of^d.]

Hence then may be seen,

II. The danger of it—

This is declared,

1. From the very nature of the sin itself—

[Consider what the sin is: it is a discarding of the only remedy which God has provided for the necessities of fallen man. Under the Mosaic dispensation, God revealed himself to the Hebrews as the only true God; and entered into covenant with them to be their God, if they would serve him in sincerity and truth. But, if any one *made void* that law^e, and departed from him to worship other gods, he appointed, that, upon the fact being proved by two or three witnesses, the offender should be stoned to death^f; and it was expressly forbidden to any person to conceal the crime: if it should have been committed by a man's dearest friend or relative, he must reveal it to the constituted authorities, and take the lead in executing sentence on the offender^g. In this law the Hebrews had acquiesced as holy, and just, and good. (Here let me suggest, by the way, that the illustration here brought by the Apostle farther shews, what the sin was of which he spake; namely, that it was not *every* wilful sin, but a wilful renunciation of the Gospel of Christ.) Now, says the Apostle, if so severe a sentence was executed, without any mercy, on the contemner of the Mosaic covenant, and the judges themselves declared the offender to be "*worthy of it*," "of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who has renounced the Christian covenant; since he has trodden under-foot the Son of God, &c.?" Here he appeals to them, and makes them judges in their own cause.

^d Heb. vi. 4—6.

^e ἀθετήσας, ver. 28.

^f Deut. xvii. 2—7.

^g Deut. xiii. 6—9.

^h Deut. xvii. 6.

And to you also do I appeal. If they who renounced that legal covenant, the provisions of which were chiefly of a temporal nature, and the engagements of it ratified only with the blood of beasts, were counted worthy of such a tremendous punishment as death; of how much sorer punishment must he be worthy, who renounces the covenant of grace, in which all the blessings of grace and glory are made over to us, and which has been ratified and confirmed with the blood of God's only dear Son? I consent that you shall be judges in your own cause, and the arbiters of your own fate. They who renounced the law were guilty of most egregious folly and ingratitude: but their impiety was not to be compared with yours: for whilst, as renouncing the only means of salvation, you resemble them, your impiety is greater than theirs, in proportion as the covenant which you despise is more glorious than theirs, and the mercies which you reject have been purchased for you at a dearer rate.

Know then, that to such persons "there remains no more sacrifice for sins." Under the law, the sacrifices were repeated from year to year; but not so under the Gospel: Christ will never die for your sins again; nor will any other offering be made in his stead: and therefore, having renounced him, "nothing remains for you but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment," whilst you continue here; and "of fiery indignation," when you go hence, "that shall devour all the adversaries" of God and his Christ. Even *here*, I say, the punishment of such persons is awful: for, to say the least, they are in a state of uncertainty what shall be their fate in the eternal world; and they have frequently in their minds and consciences such an anticipation of their doom, as appals their souls, and terrifies their spirits, and forms a very hell within them: and the moment they go hence, the wrath of an incensed God comes upon them to the uttermost.]

2. From the fixed determination of God to punish it—

[God has said, "Vengeance belongeth unto me; and I will recompenseⁱ." And again, "The Lord shall judge his people^k." Now if he, as the moral Governor of the universe, has determined to execute justice, as well as to shew mercy; and if the administering of justice be no less necessary to his own glory than the dispensing of mercy, what have the contemners of his Gospel to expect? He has said, he will thus display his righteousness at the last day: and "we know him who has said it:" we *know* that he is almighty, and therefore able to inflict punishment; and we *know* he is true, and

ⁱ Deut. xxxii. 35.

^k Deut. xxxii. 36.

therefore will fulfil his word. It is in vain to think that he will change: for “he is not a man, that he should lie; or the son of man, that he should repent.” Seeing then that he will take the matter into his own hands, judge ye, whether it be not “a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Were it only *a mortal man* that was incensed, and you had no way of escape from him, it were a terrible state for you to be in: but what must it be to be exposed to the wrath of *the living God*, who, whilst he ever lives to execute vengeance, will preserve you in existence, that you may eternally endure it? Think of enduring “*the wrath of the Lamb*,” which will be so much the more terrible, in proportion as his mercy in submitting to be slain for you has been slighted and despised.]

“Suffer ye then, brethren, a word of EXHORTATION”—

1. Watch and pray against every wilful sin—

[“Keep thy servant from presumptuous sin,” said David; “then shall I be innocent from the great transgression¹.” Now, though it is true that every wilful sin, or every presumptuous sin, does not involve us in all the guilt of apostasy, yet it leads to apostasy as its natural end and issue; because it hardens the heart, and sears the conscience, and grieves the Holy Spirit, and provokes God to leave us to ourselves: and, if once God say of us, “They are joined to idols; let them alone^m,” our doom is sealed, and our perdition sure. Let me then affectionately entreat you to guard against every wilful sin, whether of commission or omission. A man does not become an apostate all at once: he first indulges some secret lust, some filthiness either of the flesh or spirit. Then he declines into formality in his secret walk with God: then his besetting sin gets an ascendant over him: then he becomes indifferent to public ordinances; and so, from opposing the Gospel in his heart and life, he comes to abandon it even in profession, and to relapse into avowed infidelity, and a contempt of all true religionⁿ. The misery which such persons frequently endure in this life, is sufficient to make us dread such an event as this——— But that which the apostate soul shall endure in the eternal world, surpasses all conception. It would have been better for such an one never to have known the way of righteousness, than, having known it, to desert it, and make shipwreck of his faith^o.]

2. Bear in mind your obligations to Christ and to his Holy Spirit—

¹ Ps. xix. 13.

ⁿ Eccclus. xix. 1.

^m Hos. iv. 17.

^o 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

[Why did the Lord Jesus Christ die under the load of all your guilt? Was it that you might continue in your sins? — — — Why did the Holy Spirit undertake to renew and sanctify your souls; and why has he begun a work of grace in your hearts? Was it that you might “return again with the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to a wallowing in the mire?” Let then the Lord Jesus Christ behold in you the fruits of his love — — — and let the Holy Spirit rejoice in beholding in you the efficacy of his grace — — — Then it will be no formidable thing to “fall into the hands of the living God:” on the contrary, you may then with joyful hope look forward to the time of your departure, and, after the example of that Saviour in whom you have believed, you may say in your dying hour, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”]

MMCCCXIV.

THE BENEFIT OF PAST EXPERIENCE.

Heb. x. 32. *Call to remembrance the former days.*

TO take a retrospect of our past lives, is the duty of every child of man. Without a frequent revision of the past, no man can repent, no man believe, no man be saved. We must be sensible of our guilt and helplessness, before we can ever come aright to Christ for mercy and grace; and such a consciousness of our need of him can proceed from nothing but self-knowledge, the fruit of much self-examination and of a diligent inquiry into our own state. But it is not in this general view that we are now to consider the subject before us. The words were addressed to those who “had been illuminated” with Divine truth, and had “endured a great fight of afflictions” in the service of their Divine Master. It is to such therefore that we propose chiefly, if not exclusively, to limit our attention, whilst we notice the exhortation,

I. As given to the Jewish converts—

They were subjected to cruel persecutions throughout the world: and they were in danger of yielding to intimidation, and of making shipwreck of their faith.

To fortify their minds and encourage their hearts, he bids them "call to remembrance the former days."

These days deserved remembrance—

[They had been days of heavy trial to all who had embraced the Christian faith. Every convert was an object of hatred and contempt both to Jews and Gentiles. No reproaches were too bitter to cast upon the followers of Christ, no injuries too heavy to inflict upon them. Their persons were assaulted, their property destroyed—their lives menaced, and in many instances sacrificed to royal edicts, to popular fury, or to legal form. The community of interest which all felt in the welfare of the whole body, greatly augmented the sufferings of every individual. Wherever one member suffered, all the members suffered with it.

Yet in the midst of all these afflictions, the believing Jews, as a body, had maintained their steadfastness, and held fast their profession. They had not only submitted to the loss of all things for the sake of Christ, but "had taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods;" "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the Redeemer's sake."

To this measure of firmness they had attained by keeping their eye steadily fixed upon the heavenly state, where their portion was, and where an infinitely "better and more enduring substance" was treasured up for them. They had no doubt but their trials would be richly recompensed in the eternal world; and therefore they made light of all that they possessed below; "reckoning that the sufferings of this present time were not worthy to be compared with the glory that should be revealed in them^a."

Such were their former days, immediately after the light of divine truth had shone into their hearts; and]

The recollection of them would be of singular utility to them at this time—

[From a review of their past experience, they would see, that, though the difficulties which they now had to sustain, or which they were daily expecting to encounter, were formidable, they were not new, nor insupportable, nor unprofitable. They were *not new*; since they were no other than what had come upon them from the beginning: and consequently were not to be regarded as "strange" and unlooked for^b: *nor* were they *insupportable*; for every convert had already borne them for a long period; and consequently might, with the help of divine grace, support them still: *nor* were they *unprofitable*; since the effect of them had been to drive the sufferers to prayer,

^a Rom. viii. 18.

^b 1 Pet. iv. 12.

and to bring down into their souls an increase both of grace and peace. In a word, the tribulations which they had already endured, "had wrought patience, and experience, and hope;" and therefore, instead of trembling at the prospect of future trials, it became every believer to hold fast the profession of his faith, and, together with that, the rejoicing of his hope firm unto the end."]

What we have spoken sufficiently shews the scope of the Apostle's advice as given to the Hebrews to whom he wrote; and having ascertained that, we are prepared to consider it,

II. As applicable to ourselves—

That there are many amongst ourselves, who, through the tender mercy of our God, "have been illuminated" with divine truth, we firmly believe: and to a certain extent the same consequences have followed, and do still follow, a profession of the Gospel in these latter times, as in the days of old. To all of you then who have been illuminated, we would offer the same advice as the Apostle did to the Hebrew converts, persuaded that it will be profitable,

1. For our humiliation—

["Call to remembrance the former days," when first ye received the knowledge of the truth, and see whether there was not much in your experience then which may justly operate for your humiliation now. You then saw and bewailed your lost estate both by nature and practice, and gladly fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ, as to the hope set before you in the Gospel. Having obtained a view of him as your Redeemer and your all-prevailing Intercessor, you rejoiced in him with joy unspeakable, so that you seemed to be come as it were into a new world. Then the cares and pleasures of this life appeared to you as empty vanities, that were scarcely worth a thought: and then, whatever you were called to suffer, whether of loss or shame, for Christ's sake, appeared to you rather a ground of joy than of sorrow, insomuch that "you took joyfully" the injuries that were inflicted on you, and rejoiced that you were counted worthy to sustain them for Jesus' sake. Nothing intimidated you; nothing was suffered to retard your progress. With the world under your feet, and heaven in your eye, you went on cheerfully, and made your profiting daily to appear.

But now perhaps your love has grown cold; your delight in the word of God and prayer has abated; your exertions in the pursuit of heavenly things have languished; and the power of divine grace upon your souls has visibly declined. Now prudence has not merely regulated (for *that* it ought to do) your zeal, but has greatly abated, if not altogether superseded, it. Now the cares of this life have regained an ascendant over you: the frowns of the world, which once were disregarded, are become formidable in your eyes; and the fear of suffering loss in your worldly interests damps all your ardour. Now, instead of being altogether crucified to the world, and living only unto God, as in former days, you can scarcely be distinguished, except by an outward profession, from those who were never yet irradiated by the light of Gospel truth. Is this an uncommon case? Would to God it were! But what we see in the Church of Ephesus of old is yet visible, wherever the Gospel has been long preached. Of them the Lord Jesus says, "Thou has borne, and hast had patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen; and repent, and do the first works^c." So then say I to you: "Call to remembrance the former days:" remember what you once were, and what your former works: and let the view of your declension fill you with shame and sorrow and contrition. Be afraid and tremble, lest the Lord withdraw from you the light with which you have been illumined; and beg of him to return in mercy to your souls, and to "strengthen in you the things which remain, and are ready to die^d."]

2. For your encouragement—

[It may be that either outwardly from men, or inwardly from Satan, you are strongly tempted at this time, and need to have a word of consolation and encouragement spoken to your souls. If this be the case, "Call to remembrance the former days." Trials have not for the first time come upon you now: you have in a greater or less degree experienced them from the time that ye were first illumined. Who is it then that strengthened you to bear them at that time? Is he not still as able and as willing to help you as ever? Is not the grace of Christ as sufficient for you now as in former days? And does he not deserve as much at your hands now as he did formerly? If you rejoiced in doing and suffering for him years ago, is there not the same reason that you should do so now? If there was "a need that you should be in heaviness through manifold temptations" formerly^e, may there not be the same occasion

^c Rev. ii. 3—5.

^d Rev. iii. 2.

^e 1 Pet. i. 6.

still? and if the “trial of your faith was precious to you heretofore, yea more precious than gold, because you knew it would be found to your praise and honour and glory, as well as to the praise and honour and glory of your Lord, at his appearing^f,” should it not be alike precious now? If too an assured prospect of “a better and an enduring substance in heaven” once made all earthly things appear to you so light, that you could take joyfully the loss of all of them in the prospect of it, is it not of equal value now? or do you think that, when you shall have obtained the enjoyment of it, you will regret the sacrifices which you made with a view to it?” Then I say, “Continue to walk by the rule whereto ye have attained^g,” and “look to yourselves that ye lose not the things which ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward^h.”]

Let me improve the subject in a more particular

ADDRESS—

1. To those who have never yet been illuminated by the Gospel of Christ—

[How painful should the review of former days be to you! O! the seasons you have lost! the mercies you have abused! the guilt you have contracted! How differently have your lives been spent from what they would have been if you had been Christians indeed! You would have been fleeing from the wrath to come, and would have so made your light shine before men, as to “condemn the world” around you, even as Noah did when he built the ark: and you would have found in Christ such peace as passeth understanding, and such joy as should have infinitely overbalanced all that you could ever do or suffer for him. But of persecution for righteousness’ sake you know nothing; and still less of that high attainment of glorying in tribulation for the sake of Christ. Look back then to the days that are past, and be confounded before God because of your impiety: and pray that “the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened,” and that you may yet be “brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of his Gospel.” Be thankful to God that the light yet shines around you: and, “while ye have the light, be careful to walk in the light;” and “give glory to the Lord your God before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. But, if ye will not hear this admonition, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore and run down day and night,” because of the awful judgments that await youⁱ.]

^f 1 Pet. i. 7.

^g Phil. iii. 16.

^h 2 John, ver. 8.

ⁱ Jer. xiii. 16, 17.

2. To those who, though illuminated by the Gospel, are not walking in the enjoyment of the Divine presence—

[This may arise from temptation and spiritual bondage, or from sloth and carnality, and worldly-mindedness. If it have arisen from the former, God forbid that I should “break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax:” let me rather “hold up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees, and encourage the fearful heart.” Well I know that the soul of a righteous man may be bowed down with spiritual distress, and be so sore troubled under the hidings of God’s face, as to be deaf to the voice of consolation. Such was the state of David at one time^k; and the remedy to which he betook himself was precisely that which is recommended in my text. “I considered,” says he, “the days of old, the years of ancient times. *I call to remembrance my song in the night*^l.” Then comparing his present painful experience with that which he had formerly enjoyed, he acknowledges, that all his present doubts and fears were the result of “his own infirmity.” And then, to prevent the return of any such distressing apprehensions, he adds, “I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old^m.” Thus then do ye: call to remembrance the experience of former saints, and your own also at more favoured seasons: and then bear in mind that, though you change, God is the same, and that “with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

But if, as in too many instances is the case, your darkness arise from a relaxation of your diligence, and an indulgence of worldly or carnal affections, I must “change my voice, for I stand in doubt of you;” and would have you also stand in doubt of yourselves, till it be clear that “Christ is formed in you” of a truth. If you are drawing back from God in secret, beware lest he leave you to yourselves to “go back to everlasting perdition.” To “have run well for a season,” will be of little avail, if you do not press forward in your heavenly course. The threatening denounced against backsliding Ephesus lies in full force against you; and you will do well to take heed to it. “I will come unto thee quickly,” says Christ, “and will remove thy candlestick, except thou repent.” Oh, return from all your backslidings with penitential sorrow and a lively faith; so shall your backslidings be healed; and “so iniquity shall not be your ruin!”]

3. To those who are walking steadfastly in their Christian course—

^k Ps. lxxvii. 2—4. ^l Ps. lxxvii. 5—10. ^m Ps. lxxvii. 11.

[Are you under trials? Every day brings you nearer to the termination of them: and your Lord and Saviour is just ready to set the crown of victory upon your head, and to put you into full possession of that better and enduring substance that awaits you. Look up to heaven and see the myriads that are now around the throne. "Whence came they? They all came out of great tribulation, and washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. *Therefore* are they before the throne of Godⁿ." And *therefore* shall you soon join their company, and unite with them in songs of praise to God and to the Lamb for ever. Only "be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life," according to that sure word of promise, "To him that overcometh will I give to sit down with me upon my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father upon his throne." "He is faithful who hath promised, who also will do it" in its appointed time.]

ⁿ Rev. vii. 14, 15.

MMCCCXV.

PATIENT FORTITUDE REQUIRED.

Heb. x. 35, 36. *Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.*

THERE have been, to the Church of Christ, seasons of bitter persecution, and seasons of comparative tolerance and peace: but in whichever of these states we be, it becomes us not to yield to dejection on the one hand, or undue security on the other. We are soldiers on the field of battle, and must be ready to encounter our enemies whensoever they may advance against us. It will be time enough to put off our armour, when we have received our dismissal from an earthly warfare, and are crowned with laurels in the realms of bliss. There had been to the Hebrew Christians seasons of severe trial, which the Apostle called to their remembrance: and it is probable, that when this epistle was written to them they enjoyed somewhat of tranquillity: but he bade them not to cast away their confidence: since they would still

have need of it, as long as they should continue in the body.

In this apostolic injunction we see,

I. What state of mind befits the Christian—

The “confidence” here spoken of is a holy boldness in confessing Christ—

[This is essential to the Christian character. Not even faith itself will avail for our salvation, where this is wanting: “With the heart, man believeth unto righteousness; but, with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation^a.” “If we are ashamed of Christ, and deny him, he will be ashamed of us, and deny us^b.”

This holy fortitude we should maintain, under all circumstances. Never, for a moment, should we “cast it away.” If trials increase, we need it the more: if they abate, or even cease, we still need this divine quality; because we know not how soon it may be called for, or to what an extent it may be required.]

And it will bring its own reward along with it—

[It will keep us from all that disquietude and distraction which the menaces of the world might occasion in an unstable mind. It will induce a consistency of conduct, under all circumstances; and will bring into the soul, stability and peace. It will be to him who exercises it an unquestionable evidence of his own sincerity; and will doubtless be honoured with peculiar manifestations of the Divine favour. If more than ordinary supports are called for by reason of the augmented troubles that assault us, they shall be vouchsafed to us; even as they were to the Hebrew Youths in the furnace, when the Son of God himself condescended visibly to appear in their behalf.]

To every Christian is this requisite, because of,

II. The occasion he will have for it—

Different as may be the path of different persons in some respects, in their great outline they are all the same. In their progress, all these different steps may be clearly and distinctly seen:

1. Duty—

[Every Christian “does the will of God.” To believe in Christ, to receive every thing from Christ in the exercise of faith and prayer, and to give himself up to God without

^a Rom. x. 10.

^b Matt. x. 32, 33.

reserve; *this* is the one habit of his mind, and the one labour of his life. From day to day he does not his own will, or the will of an ungodly world; but the will of God, as it is revealed in his blessed word.]

2. Suffering—

[This will always more or less attend a faithful discharge of our duty to God. There will now, as formerly, be seasons of comparative peace: but it is not possible for unregenerate men to love the light, whether it be set before them in the word, or be exhibited before them in the conduct of God's faithful servants. "The servant cannot be greater than his Lord:" if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, those of his household must assuredly expect some opprobrious designation at the least. And though, in comparison of imprisonment and death, this may be regarded as a light matter; yet is it not light, when we consider, that the names with which the godly are designated, are a signal for the world to load them with every species of obloquy and contempt.]

3. Patience—

[Our blessed Lord was "as a sheep led to the slaughter," and, in the midst of all the indignities that were offered him, "opened not his mouth." And in this manner his faithful followers also "possess their souls in patience." They expect that they shall "have need of patience;" and it is their endeavour so to demean themselves under their trials, that "patience may have its perfect work; that so they may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."]

4. Glory—

[This is the object of their pursuit; and to this they press forward with all their might. They know, that "if they draw back, it must be unto perdition;" and that it is by believing only, and maintaining their faith with steadfastness, that they ever can be saved^c. They are well assured, that the means must be used for the attainment of the end; and that if used aright, the end shall be attained. They are well aware, that *duty* must be performed, *suffering* expected, *patience* exercised: and in this way they have no doubt but that *glory* shall be ultimately secured. "By a patient continuance in well-doing, they seek, and will obtain, eternal life."]

APPLICATION—

1. Let us be thankful for the peace that we are privileged to enjoy—

^c ver. 38, 39.

[These are days of extraordinary toleration and candour. We cannot indeed say that "the offence of the cross has ceased:" for it never can cease, as long as the ungodly constitute the great majority of the world. But persecution, except in private circles, is but little known. The flames of martyrdom are no longer kindled amongst us, as in the days of old. Let us, then, make a due improvement of this great mercy, for the more abundant edification of our own souls, and for a more active advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world^d.]

2. Let us, however, stand prepared for other days—

[No one can tell how soon the face of things may be changed. If Popery were to gain an ascendant again, it would, in all probability, bring with it all its attendant horrors. But even in private life we may be called to make severe sacrifices, and to suffer the loss of all our prospects upon earth. But let us remember, that Heaven will richly repay us for all that we may either lose or suffer: and if only we "receive at last the promise" of eternal life, we shall never have reason to regret the "patience" we exercised, and the "confidence" we maintained.]

^d See Acts ix. 31.

MMCCCXVI.

THE TRUE MEANS OF PERSEVERING TO THE END.

Heb. x. 38, 39. *Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.*

TRIALS are the portion of all the people of God: times and circumstances may occasion a considerable difference as to the measure in which individual believers may be called to endure them: but to all, without exception, it must still be said, as well as to the Hebrews of old, "Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye may receive the promise." To all may the same consolation also be administered; namely, that our Lord and Saviour will speedily come to the relief of his afflicted people; and that, if only we believe in him we shall assuredly be saved.

The words in which the Apostle thus consoled the Hebrews, are taken from the Prophet Habakkuk; who was himself comforted with this assurance, when bewailing and deprecating the calamities which were about to be brought upon the Jewish nation by their Chaldean enemies^a. And they are applicable to the Church of God in all ages; since that same almighty Saviour, who promised to interpose in behalf of his believing people then, still engages to be their support in the time of trouble, and only requires that they should look to him with humble and assured confidence, that their trust in him shall not be in vain.

To this consolatory declaration the Apostle adds a most solemn caution, that, if any be turned back from God by means of their trials, it will be to their everlasting perdition.

That the warning may come more distinctly before you, I will endeavour to shew,

I. The way to eternal life—

This is the same in all ages: we must live by faith alone: whatever our own personal character may have been, we must look to God as “the Author and Giver of all good;” and on him as reconciled to us in the Son of his love, we must rely for a supply of all that we need either for body or for soul, for time or for eternity.

By faith we are first introduced into the divine life—

[From the manner in which the Apostle quotes this prophecy in other places, it is evident that the sense of it is more large and comprehensive than we should of ourselves have imagined. In the Epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians, St. Paul enters fully and argumentatively upon the subject of a sinner’s justification before God; and shews, in opposition to all the erroneous notions both of Jews and Gentiles, that it is not by works of any kind, whether ceremonial or moral, but simply and entirely by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In both these epistles too he not only adduces this prophecy as confirming his doctrine, but he lays a peculiar

^a Hab. i. 6, 12. and ii. 2—4.

stress upon it, as establishing his doctrine beyond all contradiction^b — — — Know ye then, as a matter of primary importance, that, if ever you would live before God, you must come to him as sinners destitute of all help or hope in yourselves, and must cast yourselves entirely upon that Saviour, “whom he has set forth to be a propitiation for sin,” and “not for your sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” There is no other way in which any man can come to God^c; nor any other name but that of Jesus, whereby any sinner in the universe can be saved^d.]

By faith also we must persevere in it even to the end—

[There is no other way for our continuance in life than that by which we are first brought into a state of spiritual existence. As at the beginning it is said, “He that hath the Son of God hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life^e,” so must it be said even to the end: for “all our fresh springs are in him:” “He is the fountain of life; and in his light alone we can see light.” Have we continually fresh sins to be forgiven? There is no way of being cleansed from them but by washing continually in “the fountain which has been once opened for sin and uncleanness^f.” Have we on account of our remaining corruptions continual need of fresh supplies of grace? There is no other source of grace but He: “it hath pleased the Father that in HIM should ALL fulness dwell^g,” and “out of his fulness must we all receive, even grace for grace^h.” Are our trials and afflictions multiplied from time to time? It is in his everlasting arms that we must be upheld, and “his grace alone that can be sufficient for us.” In a word, it is “by faith that we must stand” every momentⁱ: “by faith too we must walk^k,” yea, from first to last, “we must live altogether by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us^l.” “As we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so we must walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and *established in the faith* as we have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving^m.”]

But in order to maintain our steadfastness in this way, it is necessary we should consider,

II. The danger of departing from it—

On few passages of Scripture do we behold more glaring perversions than in comments upon these

^b Rom. i. 17. and Gal. iii. 11.

^c John xiv. 6.

^d Acts iv. 12.

^e 1 John v. 12.

^f Zech. xiii. 1.

^g Col. i. 19.

^h John i. 16.

ⁱ Rom. xi. 20.

^k 2 Cor. v. 7.

^l Gal. ii. 20.

^m Col. ii. 6, 7.

words. Some, in order to uphold a favourite system, will deny that the persons here cautioned against apostasy are the same as are spoken of in the preceding and following context. But I entreat you, brethren, never so to wrest the word of God. Take the word as little children, without inquiring what human system it appears to favour; and let it have all the force which it evidently bears in the passage from whence it is taken: and if you cannot reconcile different parts of God's blessed word, leave that to him, saying, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter." It is plain that every man, whatever his attainments be, has need of this solemn warning: it is evident beyond all contradiction, that many, after having long professed to believe in Christ, and some also of the most distinguished attainments in religion, have gone back, and made shipwreck of their faith: and Paul himself felt a need of exercising continual watchfulness and self-denial, "lest, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away." Consider then, all of you, the danger of turning back from the good way in which you are now walking:

1. You will inexpressibly grieve and offend your God—

[God says, "My soul shall have no pleasure in you." In the humble and steadfast saint he has great delight; "he taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy." But if any man leave off to behave himself wisely, how can God take pleasure in him? Whilst walking steadfastly and uprightly before God, the believer complies with all God's gracious designs, and furthers, to that extent at least, the glory of God's name. But when he draws back from God, he proclaims to all around him, that, in his estimation at least, God is not so worthy to be loved and served as once he had thought him to be; and that, after a full estimate of their respective claims, the world and the flesh are deserving of at least an equal regard with him, if not also a superior regard. Now, I ask, can a *jealous* God look with complacency on such a man? Would even a fellow-creature, when once admitted into the nearest relation to us, be satisfied with such an avowal?

ⁿ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^o Ps. cxlvii. 11.

But the words in my text are intended to convey much more than they express: they import that God will look upon such a backslider as an object of his utter abhorrence. This is more plainly declared in the book of Revelation; where the Lord Jesus Christ, addressing the Laodicean Church, says, "I would thou wert cold or hot: but because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth^p." This shews us the true light in which God views "the backslider in heart;" he lothes and abhors him as a base ungrateful wretch, who has ceased to behave himself wisely, and has "returned, like a dog to his vomit, and like a sow that has been washed to her wallowing in the mire."

2. You will infallibly destroy your own soul—

[So says my text: they who draw back, "draw back unto perdition." O what a fearful thought! Who can tell all that is implied in the word "perdition?" It is remarkable, that the day of judgment is expressly called, "the day of the perdition of ungodly men^q:" and so indeed it will prove. *Now* the ungodly have the upper hand, and do what they can to destroy the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world: but *then* the Judge of quick and dead will deal with them, and recompense upon their heads all the evil that they have done. But on none will so severe a doom be inflicted as on those who "have forsaken the right way," and "after having once escaped the pollutions of the world, have been again entangled therein and overcome: with them the latter end will be worse than the beginning^r."]]

Yet, though the danger of falling is such as may well excite in us a holy watchfulness, it need not generate in us a slavish fear: since God engages to uphold the upright in heart: and they are therefore warranted in expecting from him all needful aid.

That we may not unnecessarily make the heart of the righteous sad, we shall endeavour to mark,

III. When our actual progress in the way of life has been such as will warrant a good hope of our continuance in it to the end.

But here we must not take a high standard, since the Apostle's confidence referred not to himself only, but to the great mass of the believing Hebrews throughout the world. If then it be asked, who they

^p Rev. iii. 15, 16.

^q 2 Pet. iii. 7.

^r 2 Pet. ii. 10, 15, 20, 21.

are who may hope to persevere in the good way? I answer,

1. Those who are still advancing in the face of difficulties—

[Where there is nothing to try our faith and patience, no conclusions can be drawn respecting the principle of grace that is within us; but, when we are fighting against the world, and the flesh, and the devil, and maintaining the conflict undismayed, we may be sure that God is with us of a truth: and a certainty that “God hath begun a good work within us, is a just ground of confidence, that he will carry it on, and perfect it to the end^s.” God has promised that “he will keep the feet of his saints:” and that “the righteous shall hold on his way, and he who hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger.” If then we have an evidence within ourselves, that we are indeed endeavouring to approve ourselves to God in a holy and consistent conduct, we need not alarm ourselves about future trials, but may safely and confidently commit the keeping of our souls to God, assured, that he will order every thing for us, and that “as our day of trial is, so shall our strength to meet it be.”]

2. Those who regard the salvation of their souls as that one object which they are determined at all events to attain—

[If a man have not thoroughly learned that lesson, that his soul is of more value than the whole world, it matters not what his present attainments be; he has no security whatever against a speedy and final apostasy. But, if he be determined in his heart, that, whatever come, he will not barter away his soul, or suffer the salvation of it to be compromised, that man will stand: “he has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from him.” The faith of such an one may be but weak at present; but it shall prevail at last: and because he believes to the *valuing* of his soul, his faith will operate to the *saving* of his soul.

Lower than this we cannot go; but thus low we must: for it is not the measure of a man's attainments, so much as the reality of his faith, that we are concerned to inquire after. It is the Lord Jesus Christ alone that can carry on the work effectually in the heart even of the most advanced Christian: and if he see in the least and meanest of his people, that their hearts are upright towards him, “he will carry the lambs in his bosom,” and “suffer none to pluck them out of his hands.”]

^s Phil. i. 6.

Be persuaded now to BEAR IN MIND,

1. That there is in the mind of God an immense difference between man and man—

[Here we are all together; and the world sees little difference between us: but on some, God looks with pleasure and complacency; and on others, with aversion and abhorrence. Yes, if there be one amongst us that is poor and of a contrite spirit, God says, "To that man will I look." And he will look on him with unutterable delight, insomuch that his very "soul" shall be refreshed with the sight of him. See this poor despised creature, whom man regards as "the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things:" he has a beauty in God's eyes, which makes him lovely beyond all conception: his every word and thought are so dear to God, that he listens to it with delight, and records it in the book of his remembrance, and anticipates with joy the period when he shall have an opportunity of testifying before the whole assembled universe his love for him^t. No bridegroom ever so rejoiced over his bride, as he does over this creature that is bemoaning his own unworthiness^u. No monarch conceives himself so enriched by the most splendid diadem, as God does by this acquisition to his family^x: and he contemplates with inconceivable delight the prospect of securing to himself the everlasting possession of one in whom he takes so deep an interest^y.

But is it thus that he looks on all? Alas! alas! we read of many, whom the world accounts blessed, whom yet "his soul abhors^z." On them indeed his eye is fixed, as well as on others; but "it is upon them for evil and not for good;" and the only complacency which he feels respecting them is, "Ah! I will ease me of mine adversaries: their foot shall slide in due time:" "I will whet my sword, and will make mine arrows drunk with their blood^a." Think not that God is the same to all: indeed he is not: if to some he is a God of love and mercy, to others "he is a consuming fire." Ah! beloved, when will ye believe this? When will ye realize this thought? When will ye ask, What are God's views of me? what are his thoughts towards me? Could you but be persuaded to do this, we might yet hope to see you humbled before God, and God's soul delighting in you.]

2. That there is, and will be, a corresponding difference between men in the eternal world—

[Not only of the world at large are there millions "perishing for lack of knowledge," but even of the Church; and of

^t Mal. iii. 16, 17.

^u Isai. lxii. 5.

^x Isai. lxii. 3.

^y Jer. xxxii. 40, 41.

^z Ps. x. 3.

^a Deut. xxxii. 19, 20, 35, 40—42.

those who once appeared in a hopeful way, are multitudes "drawing back unto perdition." How little do both the one and the other of these imagine what awaits them at the moment of their departure hence! Could they conceive it, how would they now be filled with horror! how would their spirits sink within them! How earnest would they be in their inquiries, What must I do to be saved? Verily they would no longer be so gay, and easy, and secure, as they now are: nor, if we had a just view of their condition, could we speak of them but with floods of tears. Ah! brethren, when will ye believe that such a thing is *possible*? When will ye believe that such a thing is *true*? But true it is, whether ye will believe it or not: I pray God, ye may so believe it on the report of the Gospel, as never to taste it by bitter experience.

But of others there are a goodly number, (O! that God would multiply them an hundred-fold!) who are "believing in Christ to the saving of their souls." They are already brought out of Egypt, and are pursuing their journey steadily through this dreary wilderness to the promised land. They meet with difficulties; but they are not discouraged: they go on in the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ: and speedily will they attain the great end of their faith, even the everlasting salvation of their souls. O who can estimate aright their prospects? Happy, happy people! How shall we attempt to describe the blessedness that awaits you? What a heaven will burst upon the soul at the first instant of its departure from the body! And what inconceivable bliss will it enjoy in the immediate and everlasting fruition of its God! But I must forbear. In attempting to expatiate on such a subject, I am only darkening counsel by words without knowledge. But do ye, my beloved brethren, have worthy thoughts of your high calling; and labour night and day to walk worthy of it.

These things may to many appear as a cunningly-devised fable: but know, all of you, that they are the very truth of God; and that, of the multitudes who are now around you, there will soon be many weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; whilst some, who have been plucked as brands out of the burning, will be seated upon thrones of glory, and singing everlasting Hallelujahs to God and to the Lamb.]

3. That the one great line of distinction between them is "faith"—

[It is by "faith that the just live;" and it is by unbelief that all others are excluded from the kingdom of heaven. Faith is indeed a hidden principle: but it is strongly operative, wherever it exists; and wherever it operates aright, will

assuredly be productive of all the benefits which are here traced to it.

But, notwithstanding all that is said of this principle in the Holy Scriptures, and the indispensable necessity of it to the salvation of the soul, how few condemn themselves for their want of it! How few pray to God for it, or are even conscious of their need of it! What greater proof can there be of the blindness with which Satan has blinded the whole world! Men will readily enough acknowledge their need of holiness; but of faith they feel no need: they think they have as much of it as is necessary for their salvation. But, if they would only see how totally inoperative their supposed faith is, they would see at once that they are as destitute of real faith as are even the beasts that perish. Dear brethren, be aware of this: and cry mightily to God to impart unto you this spiritual gift. It is, in all who have it, the gift of God. No man can produce it in his own heart: it is not a mere conviction founded upon reasoning, but a principle infused into the soul: and it is by that living principle alone you can ever be brought to a state of acceptance with God in this world, and the enjoyment of his favour in the world to come. May God in his mercy create it in all our hearts! and may its fruits within us now be a pledge and earnest of its yet richer blessings in the realms of glory.]

MMCCCXVII.

THE NATURE OF FAITH.

Heb. xi. 1. *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

CONSIDERING how much the Scriptures speak of faith, one is surprised that the subject of faith so little occupies the attention of the world at large, or even of the religious world. But the truth is, that the nature of faith is but little known. The world at large consider it as no more than assent upon evidence; whilst the religious world confine their views of it almost exclusively to the office of justifying the soul before God. But faith is of a far more comprehensive nature than even good men generally suppose. It extends to every thing that has been revealed; and is the one principle that actuates the Christian in every part of the divine life. From not

adverting to this, the description given of faith in our text has been frequently misunderstood. The precise import of the passage will best appear by considering the context. The Apostle is encouraging the believing Hebrews to hold fast their profession. He tells them that faith is the only principle that will enable them to do this: he then proceeds to shew them in a great variety of instances, how faith will act, and how certainly, if duly exercised, it will prevail for the carrying of them forward even to the end.

It is in this general view, and not in the light of justifying the soul, that the Apostle calls it, "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen."

Let us then in this enlarged sense consider,

I. The nature of faith—

Within its proper and legitimate scope is all that God has revealed in his blessed word—

[Faith comprehends within its grasp the past, the present, and the future. By it, the Christian knows that the universe, but a few thousand years ago, had no existence, and that it was created out of nothing by the word of God. By it, he sees every thing upheld and ordered by the hand that formed it, and not so much as a hair of our head falling to the ground without his special permission. By it, he foresees that all the human race which have in successive ages passed away shall be recalled into existence at the last day, and be judged according to their works.

But more particularly faith views that great mysterious work, the work of redemption. It beholds the plan formed in the eternal councils of the Father and of the Son; and in due season with gradually increasing light revealed to man. It sees the incarnation, the death, the resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the sending forth of the Holy Spirit in all his miraculous and new-creating powers, to attest that the work was finished, and to render it effectual for the salvation of a ruined world. This work it still beholds carrying on in heaven by the Lord Jesus as our great High-priest within the vail, and as the living and life-giving Head of his Church and people. And, carrying its eye forward to future ages, it sees the Redeemer's kingdom universally established, and every subject of his empire seated with him upon his throne of glory.

All intermediate matters it beholds fulfilled in their season, and is assured, that, of every thing that God has spoken, not one jot or tittle shall ever fall to the ground.]

Of all this it brings *a full conviction to the mind*, and, as far as it can be desired, *a full experience to the soul*—

[Faith is “the evidence of things not seen.” By “evidence” is meant *such a proof as silences all objections*. Of the past, the present, or the future, what could reason declare? Nothing with any certainty. Of the mystery of redemption more especially, it could determine nothing. With our bodily senses we could ascertain nothing. Every thing is apprehended by faith only. Yet is it therefore uncertain? No: it is as clear to the mind of a believer, as if it had been demonstrated to his reason, or subjected to his sight. Having assured himself from reason, that the Scriptures are the word of God, and that the great mystery of redemption, as apprehended by him, is revealed in them, he has no doubt concerning it: his fall in Adam; his recovery by Christ; his restoration to the Divine image through the influences of the Holy Spirit; these things appear so worthy of God, and so suitable to man, that no doubt respecting them exists in the mind: and all the objections which pride and ignorance have raised against them are scattered like mists before the rising sun.

But it is not only *as true* that faith presents these things to the mind, but *as good*, *as desirable*, and *as promised*: and it so apprehends them, as to give them *an actual subsistence in the soul*: it is “the substance of things hoped for.” These things, as far as they are good, and future, are the objects of hope; and therefore, as we might suppose, unpossessed. But, though future, they are made present by the exercise of faith; and, though only hoped for, are actually enjoyed. This is a wonderful property of faith. Consolations, victories, triumphs, glory, though remote in ultimate experience, are by anticipation rendered present, so that the first-fruits, the pledge, the earnest, the foretaste are in actual possession; and whilst the grapes of Eschol assure the soul of the final possession of its inheritance, the views of Pisgah transport it thither, and enable it to realize its most enlarged hopes and expectations.]

From this description of faith we may see,

II. Its aspect on the welfare and stability of the soul—

As entering into every part of the divine life, its influence might be pointed out in an almost infinite variety of particulars. But we will content ourselves

with specifying two, which will, to a certain degree, give an insight into all :

1. It renders us indifferent to all the concerns of time and sense—

[Whilst we are in the body we cannot be *absolutely* indifferent to earthly things ; but *comparatively* we may. The unbeliever has respect to nothing else : he sees nothing, knows nothing, cares for nothing, but what is visible and temporal. He is “ of the flesh,” and “ savours only the things of the flesh.” His hopes, his fears, his joys, his sorrows, are altogether carnal. So it once was with the believer : but it is now so no longer. By faith he now views other things, which fully occupy his mind, and engage all the powers of his soul. Earthly vanities once appeared as grand and glorious as the starry heavens. But they are fled from his sight : they are all eclipsed by the splendour of the Sun of Righteousness which has arisen upon his soul. There indeed they are ; and were the light of God’s truth withdrawn from his soul, they would again resume a measure of their former importance. But they are now reduced to insignificance : and the things which “ once appeared glorious in his eyes, have now no glory by reason of the glory that excelleth.” Ignorant persons are ready to impute the believer’s withdrawalment from the world to superstition, to moroseness, to pride, to enthusiasm, to gloom and melancholy. But he renounces the world as an empty vanity, and an ensnaring “ lie,” that deceives all who follow it, and ruins all who trust in it. Once “ a deceived heart had turned him aside, so that he could not deliver his soul, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand ?” but now he knows, that what he formerly grasped, was a mere shadow ; and that there is nothing substantial but what is apprehended by faith. Hence “ What was once gain to him, is now accounted loss ; yea all things are now but as dung, that he may win Christ, and be found in him.” Such are now his views of the cross of Christ, and of the glory that shall be revealed, that “ the world is crucified to him, and he is crucified unto the world^a.”]

2. It strengthens us both for action and for suffering in the service of our God—

[Before that faith has brought a man to a view of the things which are invisible and eternal, he has no zeal for God, no fortitude to suffer shame for the sake of Christ. But when once the realities of the eternal world are open to his view ; when once heaven with all its glory, and hell with all its terrors, are apprehended by him ; who shall stop *him* ? who shall

^a Gal. vi. 14.

intimidate *him*? who shall persuade *him*? Bid him relax his diligence, and give way to carnal ease and pleasure; he will say, 'Go, offer your advice to one that is running in a race, or fighting for his life: will *he* listen to you? expect not *me* then to listen, who am running for eternity, and fighting for my soul.' Is he called to suffer? He knows for whose sake it is that he is called to take up his cross; and he takes it up with cheerfulness, and "rejoices that he is counted worthy to bear it." Has he made considerable advance in the ways of God? He does not on that account relax; but "forgetting what is behind, and reaching forward to that which is before, he presses on towards the mark for the prize of his high calling of God in Christ Jesus^b." These are the things which are chiefly insisted on throughout the whole of this chapter: and, as such were the operations of faith in the days of old, such also they are at this hour; and such will they be to the very end of time.]

SEE you not then, beloved,

1. How little there is of true faith in the world?

[If you will believe the report which men give of themselves, there is no want of faith at all. Every one who calls himself a Christian, considers it as a matter of course that he possesses faith. But how would faith operate under other circumstances? Let a man believe that a house in which he is sitting is on fire; or that a vessel in which he is embarked is ready to sink; will he not evince the truth of his faith by some efforts to escape? But here men profess to believe all that God has spoken about the danger of their souls, and the way opened for their deliverance, and yet are as unconcerned about either the one or the other as the beasts that perish. Alas! how fearfully do they deceive their own souls!

But even in the religious world there is an awful want of faith. For how little are men actuated by the truths which they profess to believe! How strong is the hold which earthly things yet retain of the believer's soul, and how faint are his impressions of eternity! — — — Well might our Lord say, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth^c?" Know ye, brethren, that "if you had faith but as a grain of mustard-seed, it should remove mountains:" and, consequently, you may judge of the smallness of your faith by the slender effects which it has produced upon your souls. Pray ye then to Him who alone can give you faith; "Lord, help my unbelief;" "Lord, increase my faith."]

2. In what way alone you can hope to vanquish all your spiritual enemies?

^b Phil. iii. 13, 14.

^c Luke xviii. 8.

[It is "by faith that you are to walk, and not by sight." In order to form a correct judgment of things, listen not to the report of sense, but consult the testimony of faith. Send faith as a spy to search out the heavenly land that is before you. If you attend to the voice of unbelief, it will tell you of nothing but Anakims that are invincible, and "of cities that are walled up to heaven." But if you ask for the account which faith will give, it will tell you, "They are bread for us^d," and shall be as easily devoured, and as profitably to our souls, as the food that is put into our mouths. What the effect of this principle shall be upon your souls, you may see in the case of the Apostle Paul. Greater trials than his you cannot expect to encounter: and greater supports you cannot need. But whence arose his supports? He was animated by "*a spirit of faith*:" by that, he foresaw the issue of his conflicts: and by that he was upheld: and, through the influence of that, all his afflictions appeared but light and momentary, yea, and the very means of augmenting his happiness and glory^e — — — Thus shall faith operate in you: it shall "work by love:" it shall "purify the heart;" it shall "overcome the world^f." Only "live by faith:" and if at any time you be ready to stagger through unbelief, remember that "he is faithful who hath promised;" and "be strong in faith, giving glory to God." For of this you may be perfectly assured, that the more lively your faith is, the more abundant will be its fruits; and that in every hour of trial "according to your faith it will be done unto you."]

^d Numb. xiv. 9. ^e 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9, 13—18. ^f 1 John v. 4.

MMCCCXVIII.

ABEL'S OFFERING INSTRUCTIVE TO US.

Heb. xi. 4. *By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.*

IN reading the history of the saints under the Old Testament dispensation, we are constrained to admire their conduct on many occasions, and to regard them as excellent patterns for our imitation. But we should not readily have traced all their diversified excellencies to one principle, and still less to the principle of *faith*, if it had not been done for us by an inspired writer. But, now that it is done, we see the

truth, and the importance too, of the suggestion; and are stirred up to cultivate the same principle in order to the attainment of their virtues.

The Apostle, in adducing instances of the power of faith from the beginning of the world to the close of the Jewish records, omits all mention of Adam, who, we doubt not, both lived and died in faith. But his aim in this part of his epistle is to encourage the believing Hebrews to persevere in their holy profession, notwithstanding all the trials to which they might be subjected on account of it: and, as nothing particular is recorded concerning Adam's faith, and Abel was a martyr for the faith, it was more to his purpose to commence his catalogue of worthies with the name of Abel; of whose offering we are now more particularly called to speak. To illustrate what the Apostle says concerning it, I shall shew,

I. In what consisted the peculiar excellence of Abel's offering as contrasted with that of Cain—

By referring to the account given us in the book of Genesis, we find,

1. That Abel's offering differed widely from that of Cain—

[Cain brought only "of the fruits of the ground^a." Now this he might have done even in Paradise; since it was only *a tribute of gratitude* towards his heavenly Benefactor, and *an acknowledgment of dependence* on him for a continuance of his favours. But Abel brought "of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat^b" by which he acknowledged himself a sinner deserving of death, and his hope of mercy only through the intervention of a vicarious sacrifice. By this act, he professed his faith in that Saviour who was in due time to die for the sins of the whole world, and whom the sacrificial ordinances already instituted were intended to prefigure. That sacrifices had been ordained of God, is evident, from its being said that Abel offered his sacrifice "by *faith*:" for had Abel offered this sacrifice of his own mind, there could have been no scope for the exercise of faith; since faith necessarily has respect to some divine declaration; and in this instance must have had respect to *a command* from God to present such an offering, and *a promise* from God to accept it. When the command

^a Gen. iv. 3.

^b Gen. iv. 4.

was first given, we are not certainly informed: but I conceive it to have been immediately after the Fall, when, as we are told, "the Lord God made coats of skins, to clothe" our first parents^c. It is evident that living creatures were then slain; and slain by God's command: and, if we suppose those living creatures then offered in sacrifice, we have the most complete exhibition of the way of salvation that is contained in all the sacred records: since, as the sin of our first parents was atoned for by the blood of those sacrifices, and the shame of their nakedness was covered by their skins, so are our sins expiated by the blood of our great Sacrifice, and our souls are clothed in the robe of his unspotted righteousness. At all events the fact is clear, that such an institution had been formed by God; else Abel's faith could not have had respect to it: and no other period for the commencement of it seems so proper as that to which we have referred, because it is the only period mentioned in the inspired history, and because, if not instituted till the time of Abel, our first parents must have been left many years without that instruction and consolation which such an ordinance was calculated to convey.

It is evident then that Abel's offering excelled that of Cain in two most important respects, namely, *in the matter of it*, and *in the disposition with which it was offered*: his being "a first-ling of his flock," whilst Cain's was only "of the fruits of the ground;" and being offered with an express view to the sacrifice which was in due time to be offered, whilst Cain had no respect whatever to himself as needing salvation, or to the Saviour by whom alone he could find acceptance with God.]

2. That God had respect to Abel's offering, and not to Cain's—

[In what way God testified his acceptance of Abel's offering we are not informed: we are sure however that it was in some way clearly understood by Abel, and as clearly by Cain also; since it was the means of filling him with envy and wrathful indignation. It is probable, that God sent fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice of Abel. This in after ages was frequently done by God; as at the first offering of sacrifices by Aaron in the tabernacle^d, and at the first offering of sacrifices also in the temple of Solomon^e. Whatever the testimony was, God shewed, by it, that he accepted both the person and the offering of Abel, whilst neither the person nor the offering of Cain were at all acceptable in his sight^f.]

Such being the acknowledged superiority of Abel's sacrifice, let us consider,

^c Gen. iii. 21.

^e 2 Chron. vii. 1.

^d Lev. ix. 24.

^f Gen. iv. 4, 5.

II. What instruction the pre-eminent acceptance of it conveys to us—

We are told that “by it, he being dead yet speaketh.” The whole record concerning it shews,

1. That man, how righteous soever he may be, needs a sacrifice—

[Abel is characterized by our blessed Lord himself as eminently righteous; being designated by the name “righteous Abel^g.” And in our text it is said, that “God bore testimony to him as a righteous man.” But did he on account of his distinguished piety not need an atonement? or did he think himself entitled to approach his God in any other way than as a self-ruined sinner, that could be saved only through the blood of a vicarious sacrifice? No; it is remarkable that Cain, who was at heart a murderer, thought he might find acceptance with God without such a sacrifice; whilst “righteous Abel” dared not to hope for mercy in any other way than through the sacrifice of Christ: and at this very hour none more deride the necessity of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in his atoning blood, than those who are hostile in their hearts to all vital godliness. But, however moral any may have been, they are sinners before God, and must seek for mercy solely through the blood and righteousness of Christ: for an Apostle expressly tells us, that “without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins^h.” Let this then be remembered by us all: for it is by no means so deeply considered as it ought: there lurks in all of us a self-righteous disposition: we, no less than the Jews of old, are averse to “submit to the righteousness of God,” and make the Lord Jesus Christ “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.” But there is “no way to the Father but by himⁱ,” nor “any name under heaven but his whereby any man can be saved^k.”]

2. That a sacrifice has been appointed of God for the sins of the whole world—

[It has been before shewn, that Abel’s “faith” necessarily pre-supposes a divine institution as the object of his faith. And what was the sacrifice that was ordained of God? Was it to the blood of bulls or goats that men were taught to look? “The blood of bulls and of goats,” as the Apostle tells us, “could never take away sins.” That same person who was foretold to Adam as “the Seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent’s head,” was to effect that victory by having

^g Matt. xxiii. 35.

ⁱ John xiv. 6.

^h Heb. ix. 22.

^k Acts iv. 12.

his own heel first bruised¹, or, as Saint Paul expresses it, he was "through death to destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil^m:" in a word, he was to "redeem us to God by his blood," and to be the propitiation not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world. He it was who, both in Abel's sacrifice, and in all the sacrifices under the law, was shadowed forth; and who is therefore called "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the worldⁿ." Before he came into the world, his sacrifice had a retrospective, as at the time of its being offered it had a prospective, efficacy for the salvation of all who trusted in it; so that, from the beginning to the end of time, he is the only Saviour of sinful man.]

3. That through that sacrifice all who believe in it shall assuredly be saved—

[We are told that the record concerning Abraham's having his faith imputed to him for righteousness, "was *not written for his sake alone*, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead^o." And we may be perfectly sure, that the record concerning the efficacy of Abel's faith, and the testimony given to him from God respecting the acceptableness of his sacrifice, was not for his honour merely, but for our encouragement. It shews to us how pleasing in God's sight the humble Publican is in comparison of the self-applauding Pharisee, especially when he rests all his hopes of mercy on the atoning blood of Christ. It shews us, that God "will fill the hungry with good things, whilst the rich he will send empty away." In a word, it shews us, that "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin;" that "whosoever cometh unto God by him shall in no wise be cast out;" and that "all who believe in him shall be justified from all things." Thus, whilst it directs us to the blood of Christ as the ground of our hope, it assures us, that that "blood speaketh not only as much and as satisfactorily as the blood of Abel did, but far better things than that ever did or could speak^p."]

There is one thing not yet noticed in our text, which deserves particular attention, and which will serve us for an APPLICATION of the subject to our souls—

"By his faith," and the consequent acceptance of his sacrifice, "Abel, though dead, yet speaketh to us."

¹ Gen. iii. 15.

^m Heb. ii. 14.

ⁿ Rev. xiii. 8.

^o Rom. iv. 23, 24.

^p Heb. xii. 24.

HEAR THEN ABEL AS NOW SPEAKING TO YOU FROM THE DEAD.

[' Brethren, though dead, I yet live; and though I have been dead almost six thousand years, I would speak to you as though I had died but yesterday. I am concerned that you should profit by my experience. You are all assembled to worship and serve your God: and you are ready to conceive, that on that account you are all rendering unto God an acceptable service. But I must declare to you that this is far from being the case. Your outward forms, considered independently of the frame of mind in which you engage in them, are of no value in the sight of God. You may "kill an ox in sacrifice, and be only as if you slew a man: you may sacrifice a lamb, and be as if you cut off a dog's neck: you may offer an oblation, and be as if you offered swine's blood: you may burn incense, and be no more accepted, than if you blessed an idol^a." God looks not at the *act*, but at the *heart*: and if that be not right with him, your sacrifices, how costly soever they may be, are only "an abomination to him^r." Of all this you may be assured from what is related concerning my brother Cain and myself. He, as you have been told, was not accepted, whilst I was honoured with tokens of God's merciful approbation. What was it that made the difference? Why did God look on me with complacency, and with abhorrence on him? It was because I approached him as a sinner, whose hopes were founded solely on the sacrifice of his Son, whilst my brother approached him without any such exercise of repentance and faith. And so it is with you. On those who draw nigh to him with a broken and contrite spirit, and with their eyes fixed on the Lamb of God to take away their sins, he looks with delight: he will even give to them sweet tokens of his acceptance, and testimonies of his love: and, if he do not give the same *visible* demonstrations of his love to them, as he did to me, he will not leave them without witness even in the minds of their enemies: for he will so enrich their souls by his grace, as shall make it evident, that God is with them of a truth. But on the proud self-righteous formalist he will look with scorn and indignation. Yes, to those of you who have come up hither merely to perform a duty which custom has prescribed, he says, "Ye hypocrites, in vain do ye worship me, seeing that, whilst you draw nigh to me with your mouths, and honour me with your lips, your hearts are far from me^s." I warn you then not to deceive your own souls: for assuredly, whether ye will believe it or not, God will ere long make the same distinction between you that he did between me

^a Isai. lxvi. 3.

^r Prov. xxi. 27.

^s Matt. xv. 7—9.

‘ and Cain: the contrite and believing worshippers shall have
 ‘ a testimony of his approbation before the whole assembled
 ‘ universe; but the impenitent and unbelieving shall be marked
 ‘ out as monuments of his everlasting displeasure. As for you
 ‘ who worship him in faith, he may for the present leave you
 ‘ in the hands of the ungodly, who from envy may be incensed
 ‘ against you; he may even suffer your “greatest enemies to
 ‘ be those of your own household;” yea, he may leave you
 ‘ even to be put to death, and to suffer martyrdom for your
 ‘ fidelity to him. But let not that deter you from confessing
 ‘ him openly before men. I have never regretted the sufferings
 ‘ I endured for him; nor will you ever regret any thing which
 ‘ you may be called to sustain. Even the testimony which you
 ‘ shall now enjoy in your own conscience, shall be an ample
 ‘ recompence for all: what then shall that testimony in the
 ‘ day of judgment be, when he shall say, “Well done, good
 ‘ and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord?”
 ‘ Go on then without fear, and “hold fast the profession of
 ‘ your faith without wavering.” “Be faithful unto death;
 ‘ and he will give you a crown of life^t.”

Such we may well conceive to be the strains in which Abel would now address you: and I pray God that they may sink down into our ears, and produce a saving effect upon our souls. Are there any here who are “going in the way of Cain^u,” and “hating those who are more righteous than themselves^x?” Ah! think what misery attaches to such a state of mind, both in this world and the next. Even here, as God has said, “there is no peace to the wicked; but they are like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt^y,” and what will they be hereafter? What does Cain now think of that piety that he despised, and of that enmity with which he persecuted it even unto death? Now he knows who was right: and so will ye ere long, whether ye will now learn it or not. But O! stop ere it be too late: and have recourse to that sacrifice which will avail for all who trust in it. And ye who are suffering for righteousness’ sake, “marvel not as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Abel’s sufferings and of Christ’s also, that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy^z.”]

^t Rev. ii. 10. If this be the subject of a *Funeral Sermon*, it may be proper here to shew what the deceased person *did* say, or *would* say.

^u Jude, ver. 11.

^x 1 John iii. 11, 12.

^y Isai. lvii. 20, 21.

^z 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.

MMCCCXIX.

ENOCH'S TRANSLATION.

Heb. xi. 5. *By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.*

AMONGST those who obtained a good report through faith, Enoch bears a very distinguished place. He was a prophet, and bore testimony against the abominations which obtained around him, with the utmost possible fidelity. His prophecy, indeed, is preserved to us, as it were, by miracle: for neither Moses, nor any other writer of the Old Testament, makes any mention of it; nor is it referred to by any of the evangelists, or in the Acts of the Apostles: but Jude, who wrote only one short epistle, records it, and thus throws light upon the "faith" which in my text is ascribed to Enoch: he shews that Enoch had a view of Christ as the Judge of quick and dead, and of the judgment itself as passed in perfect accordance with the character and conduct of every individual of mankind^a.

Enoch, though the seventh from Adam in descent, is here introduced immediately after Abel; in order to shew, that, as in Abel the *operations* of faith were illustrated, so in Enoch might be seen its *reward*. Indeed, the translation of Enoch took place very soon after the death of Adam; that so, whilst God's hatred of sin was manifested in the one, his love of holiness might be displayed in the other.

In considering the translation of Enoch, I shall notice it,

I. As a testimony to him—

Enoch doubtless had received many tokens of God's approbation before—

[To Abel's offering God had borne witness, as being more acceptable to him than that of Cain^b. And, no doubt, many

^a Jude, ver. 14, 15.

^b ver. 4.

testimonies of Divine approbation had been vouchsafed to Enoch also. Did Enoch "walk with God^c?" No doubt, God also walked with him "as a Friend^d," "manifesting himself to him as he did not unto the world^e," and "witnessing with his spirit that he was a child of God^f" — — — Indeed, there is no one who "draws nigh to God, but God will also draw nigh to him^g," and "hold sweet fellowship with him^h," and "lift up upon him the light of his countenanceⁱ," and "shed abroad his love in his heart^k" — — —]

But, in his translation, such a testimony was borne to his character, as carried conviction with it to the minds of others also—

[A man, by inward tokens of God's approbation, "has the witness of it in himself^l:" but here was an expression of it, which carried its own evidence along with it to all who were then living upon earth, and has from that moment stamped the character of Enoch as a most distinguished favourite of heaven. No man was ever thus honoured before; and only one other person even to the present hour. By this translation to heaven, the sentence of God against sin was reversed: for death was disarmed of its power over this holy man; and he was borne to heaven, both in body and soul, without ever encountering the agonies or terrors of dissolution. What were the circumstances attendant on his removal, we know not; but, as in the case of Elijah, it must have been witnessed by some one of undoubted credibility; else the effect of it would have been lost: and, from its being said, that "he was not found," it is evident, that, as in Elijah's case also, a search was made for him, lest he should have been transported to some remote place only, instead of being borne, as they were taught to believe, into the very presence of his God^m. But the fact itself, whatever its circumstances were, is a standing proof to the whole world, that this holy man had so walked as to please his God.]

But let us view this event,

II. As an instruction to us—

Two things it obviously teaches us :

1. That there is a future state of existence, both for our souls and bodies—

^c Gen. v. 22, 24.

^d Jam. ii. 23.

^e John xiv. 21—23.

^f Rom. viii. 15, 16.

^g Jam. iv. 8.

^h 1 John i. 3.

ⁱ Ps. iv. 6.

^k Rom. v. 5.

^l 1 John v. 10.

^m 2 Kings ii. 10, 16, 17.

[It is clear that the future judgment was known to Enoch; and therefore it is most probable that he was informed as to the resurrection of the body. But, at all events, his translation gave to those of his day, and to all future ages, an evidence, that the body was capable of participating in all the glory and felicity of the soul. Of course, some change was made in him, even as there shall be in those who shall be living at the time of our Lord's advent to judge the world. At that time, all who are alive "will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality"ⁿ.] But it was essentially the same body, even as that of our blessed Lord was at the time of his ascension to heaven^o: and, though our bodies shall be consumed by worms, yet shall they be raised again, and be the subjects either of happiness or misery, according as they were employed, either in the service of God, or in rebellion against him^p.]

2. That those who have pleased God in this world shall assuredly dwell with God in the world to come—

[The eminent piety of Enoch was well known. What, then, did his translation announce, whether to that or future generations? God said by it, 'Behold how I will act towards those who serve and honour me: I will not leave you to guess at it, as a matter above your comprehensions: ye shall see it; ye shall have it brought so manifestly before your eyes, that you shall have no doubt whatever respecting it. Did he believe in me? Did he serve me? Did he walk with me? Did he, in the whole of his life and conversation, strive to honour me? In a word, did he "please" me? See then, in *him*, the felicity that awaiteth *you*: for I have set him forth as a pattern to all future ages, and as a *pledge*, that "whoso honoureth me, shall be honoured by me"^q;" and that "to him who ordereth his conversation aright, I will shew the salvation of God"^r.']

What now shall I ADD? What, but these two things? LEARN—

1. What must be your aim in life—

[You have seen what it was in Enoch that pleased God: you have seen, that he really "believed" in God; and that his whole life was one continued walk with God. "He walked, not as pleasing men, but God, who trieth the reins." So walk *ye*, and ye shall please him too; yes, and shall have such

ⁿ 1 Cor. xv. 51—53.

^o Phil. iii. 21.

^p Dan. xii. 2.

^q 1 Sam. ii. 30.

^r Ps. l. 23.

tokens of his approbation, as shall richly recompense all that you may either do or suffer for him, though it were a thousand times more than was ever yet done or suffered by mortal man — — —]

2. What should be your comfort in death—

[What is death to a child of God? It is not *death*: no; it is a *sleep*, a “falling asleep in Jesus^s.” *This* it is, as it respects the *body*; which shall surely “awake from the dust^t,” and be re-united to the soul^u. And what shall it be to the *soul*? A *translation*, such as Enoch’s was. Could you but see what takes place at the departure of a real saint, you would see the angels waiting to catch his spirit at the instant of its departure from the body, and bearing it on their wings into the presence of its God. And is not *this* an object to be desired? Do you wonder that Paul “desired to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better^x” than any state on earth can be? Regard ye death, then, in this view: and learn to number it amongst your treasures^y; and in the daily habit of your minds, “be looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of Christ^z” — — —]

^s 1 Thess. iv. 14. Acts vii. 60.

^t Isai. xxvi. 19.

^u 1 Thess. iv. 15—18.

^x Phil. i. 23.

^y 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22.

^z 2 Pet. iii. 12.

MMCCCXX.

THE NECESSITY OF FAITH.

Heb. xi. 6. *Without faith it is impossible to please [God.]*

THIS whole chapter is one continued commendation of faith: which is marked, throughout, as the one source of every good action, and as the certain prelude to everlasting felicity. But, in what is spoken of Enoch, there seems, to a superficial observer, to be no connexion with faith: for his translation was a mere act of God’s favour: and, though it is said that “he pleased God,” it may be supposed that it was by his *works* that he approved himself to God, and not by any actings of *faith*. But, in my text, the Apostle proves that faith was in Enoch the leading principle from which his works proceeded, and the true object of God’s peculiar approbation. His argument may be thus stated in a few words:

“Without faith it is impossible to please God.” But Enoch did please God: therefore it is clear that Enoch believed; and that his works, whatever they were, were the fruits of faith. Now, in confirmation of this momentous truth, I will shew,

I. What is that “faith, without which we cannot please God”—

Let the Apostle himself be heard in the words following my text. Three things he points out, as the objects of true and saving faith. It has respect to God,

1. As having an independent and immutable existence—

[The believer does not conceive of God as resembling the gods of the heathen, or as having a derived existence; but as existing necessarily from everlasting; and as immutable in every one of his perfections; “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.”]

2. As being the Moral Governor of the universe—

[This is implied in the regard he manifests to those who seek him. For, if he were not observant of the ways of men, and if he did not inspect the most secret motions of their hearts, he could not “reward” men according to their works.]

3. As fulfilling, for our good, all his covenant engagements—

[This is very particularly intended in our text. For how could he “reward” men, if they were not first “accepted in his beloved Son?” Men are sinners; and, as sinners, condemned; and utterly incapable of removing their guilt and condemnation by any thing which they themselves can do. It is through the atonement which Christ has offered for them, that they obtain reconciliation with God; and through Christ alone can any work of theirs come up with acceptance before God. But the mediation of Christ was agreed upon between the Father and Son from all eternity; Christ engaging to “make his soul an offering for sin;” and the Father engaging, for his sake, to accept the person and services of all that should believe in him^a. This, therefore, is essential to saving faith: and, in order to “please God,” we must unite these three things: a belief in God’s eternal and immutable existence; a belief in him as the Moral Governor of the universe;

^a Isai. liii. 10.

and a belief in him as fulfilling to us all his covenant engagements.]

Now, "without such faith," we are told, "it is impossible to please God." Let me then proceed to shew you,

II. Why it is so indispensable for that end—

1. Without such faith, we cannot have any right dispositions towards God—

[What can we possess of *love* to an unknown being? or what of *fear*, towards one who neither regards, nor will ever take cognizance of, our actions? What can we feel of *gratitude* towards one, to whom we can trace no obligations? or of *affiance* in one, of whose agency in the affairs of men we are altogether ignorant? It is obvious, that, so far as respects *religious* feelings, we are no better than "Atheists in the world^b." How, then, can God be "pleased" with such wretches as these? — — —]

2. Without such faith we cannot render unto God any acceptable service—

[Any service, in order to be accepted of God, must be such as he himself has required: it must have respect to his authority, as commanding it; to his word, as the rule to which it is to be conformed; and to his glory, as the end for which it is to be done. But, if we possess not faith in God, how can we have respect to his authority? or how can we conform to his word? or how can we desire to advance his glory? Any pretence of this kind must be downright hypocrisy or delusion: and, whatever the service be, it can be no better, in God's estimation, than "the cutting off a dog's neck for sacrifice, and the offering of swine's blood^c."]

APPLICATION—

Inquire, then, I pray you,

1. Into the nature and reality of your faith—

[Men, if they inquire into their state at all, are apt to confine their attention to their *works*. But here we see how necessary it is to inquire into our *faith*; since, if that be not sound and scriptural, nothing else can be right before God. Inquire, whether you have any deep conviction even of the existence of God; and still more, of his moral government, and of his inspecting every thing in order to judge the world in righteousness at the last day. Inquire still further, what

^b Eph. ii. 12. the Greek.

^c Isai. lxvi. 3.

views you have of God, as covenanting with his Son to expiate our guilt, to renovate our souls, and to present our services to him perfumed with the incense of his own merits, and rendered acceptable through his prevailing intercession. Indeed, my brethren, *these* should be subjects of our most anxious inquiry from day to day. St. Paul says, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith^d." And I also would say the same: for, if "without a true faith it is impossible to please God," you cannot but feel the indispensable importance of having this matter clearly ascertained, and distinctly determined.]

2. Into the fruits and effects of your faith—

[It is here *taken for granted*, that the believer "comes to God:" and it is certain that true faith will bring us to God, in deeply penitential sorrow, and in earnest cries for mercy. If we really believe in God, we shall "diligently seek him" in the use of all his appointed ordinances, and in the name of his only dear Son. Yes, and we shall have our expectations of mercy greatly enlarged. We shall delight to view God, not merely as a Sovereign, but as "a Rewarder," who is at all times waiting for opportunities to express the utmost possible love towards his obedient people. Say now, brethren, whether such be your views, your contemplations, your joys? Of what value is your faith, if it be not productive of these fruits? If it operate not in this way, it is no better than the faith of devils^e. "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak^f." "But we desire that every one of you" make these things a subject of most earnest inquiry; that so, after a diligent and candid examination, ye may discern your real state before God; and may be brought "to a full assurance of hope" that ye are really "pleasing God" in this world, and shall be "rewarded by him" in the world to come^g.]

^d 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

^e Jam. ii. 19.

^f Heb. vi. 9.

^g Heb. vi. 11.

MMCCCXXI.

NOAH'S FAITH.

Heb. xi. 7. *By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.*

OF all the principles which operate in the Christian's mind, faith is the most distinguished. In some

respects indeed love claims a preference, because it is the very image of the Deity^a, and will exist when faith and hope shall be no more^b. But as faith is that grace which most of all honours God, so it is that which God most delights to honour. On many occasions wherein a bright assemblage of graces shone forth, our blessed Lord overlooked all others, and commended the faith^c. The chapter before us recounts the exercises of faith in the most eminent saints from the beginning of the world to the days of the Apostles. We shall call your attention at present to the faith of Noah; and,

I. Illustrate it—

The different things here spoken respecting it require us to notice—

1. Its operations—

He credited the “Divine warning”—

[God had declared to him his intention to destroy the world by a deluge. And how did he receive the warning? Did he indulge vain reasonings about the practicability of such an event; or pretend to be more merciful than God? No. Though there was not the remotest appearance of such a thing, he believed it would certainly take place: and though to proud reason it seemed hard that all living creatures, old and young, men and beasts, should be involved in one indiscriminating ruin, yet he doubted not but that it should be as God had said; and was persuaded that “the Judge of all the earth would do right.”]

He was “moved with fear” on account of it—

[He had nothing to fear respecting his eternal state, because he was a perfect and upright man, and walked in holy fellowship with his God. But God was incensed by the wickedness of his creatures, insomuch that “he repented he had made them:” and he determined to pour out his fury upon them to the uttermost. Did it not then become Noah, as well as others, to fear and tremble? Did it become him to be so absorbed in selfishness as to be unconcerned about the destruction, the sudden, and perhaps everlasting, destruction, of all the human race? Indeed a dread of the Divine judgments was necessary, to stir him up to use the proper means

^a 1 John iv. 8.

^b 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

^c Matt. viii. 10. and xv. 28. Mark x. 52. Luke vii. 50.

for his own safety: and it was an unequivocal proof of his crediting the declarations of God concerning them.]

He exerted himself in God's appointed way—

[God commanded him to construct a vessel of an immense size, and such an one as had not been seen from the foundation of the world^d. The expense of building it must be exceeding great, so as to swallow up all his fortune. The time it would occupy would be many years; during all of which the people would be scoffing at him as a deluded visionary, and taking occasion from the very forbearance of God to load him with grosser insults^e. But he regarded not any labour, any odium, any sacrifice in the path of duty: he was intent only on executing the Divine mandate, and on providing for the security of those who should believe his testimony.]

2. Its effects and consequences—

He “condemned the world”—

[During the hundred and twenty years that he was engaged in building the ark, he preached to the world with much earnestness and fidelity: and therefore doubtless condemned them often in his discourses. But he condemned them yet more by his example. His faith condemned their unbelief; his fear, their security; his obedience, their disobedience. If he had not spoken one word with his lips, his constructing the ark would have been a tacit, but keen, and continual reproof to all around him.]

He “saved his family”—

[At the appointed time the flood came. The world, notwithstanding all the warnings given them, were as far as ever from expecting the event^f. It is probable that their contempt of Noah's superstition and folly (as they would call it) had risen to its height, when they saw this immense vessel built, and filled with all different kinds of animals, and provisioned for many months; and Noah with his little family enclosed in it, before the smallest symptom of any inundation had appeared. But in the midst of their revels the flood came and swept them all away: and Noah only, with his family, were preserved. That his family owed their preservation to *him* is clear; not only because it was ascribed to the exercise of *his* faith, but because one at least of them was as deserving of God's wrath as the generality of those who perished.]

He “became an heir of righteousness”—

^d It was above one hundred and sixty yards long, twenty-seven broad, and sixteen high.

^e 2 Pet. iii. 4.

^f Matt. xxiv. 38, 39.

[Noah knew that the whole of that mysterious dispensation was typical of the salvation which is given us in Christ Jesus^g. He saw that a more terrible deluge was about to overwhelm an ungodly world: and that Christ was the ark which God had prepared for us. Into that ark he entered by faith: and thus, being “found *in* him^h,” and “preserved *in* himⁱ,” he “became an heir of the righteousness which is by faith;” or, in other words, he was accepted, justified, and saved through the Saviour’s merits.]

While we call you to admire the faith of Noah, we would also,

II. Commend it to your imitation—

Our circumstances being wholly different from his, there must be many particulars in his faith which we cannot imitate, but the substantial parts of it are imitable by all.

1. Believe God’s testimony respecting the judgments which he will bring upon the world—

[There are great and terrible judgments denounced against the ungodly, yea, “against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men^k” — — — Nor shall gross wickedness only be the object of God’s wrath: a state of unregeneracy, whether attended with more or less open sin, will certainly involve us in the general doom^l: nor shall one of all the human race, at least not one to whom the Gospel has been preached, escape, unless he get into the ark prepared for him^m.

Now do not presume to dispute against this. Do not, because there is no appearance at present of such calamities, imagine that they shall never come. Do not pretend to be more merciful than God, and to say, God will never execute such tremendous judgments: for “he has said, and he will do it; he has spoken, and he will make it good.” It may appear as improbable as the deluge; but, however improbable it may appear, it shall come to pass; and all who will not believe it now, shall experience the truth of it to their cost.]

2. Use the means of safety which God has appointed—

[You have not to build an ark: there is one constructed and provisioned by God himself; and the door is open for you to enter in, Do not absurdly ask, “How can *that* vessel save

^g 1 Pet. iii. 20, 21.

^h Phil. iii. 9.

ⁱ Jude, ver. 1.

^k Ps. ix. 17. and xi. 6. and Rom. i. 18.

^l John iii. 3.

^m Acts iv. 12.

me?" neither attempt to form another for yourself: nor flee to this or that mountain for safety: but go to Christ: seek an interest in him by faith: commit yourself wholly and cheerfully to him: and then you may defy all the storms and billows that menace your destruction. Moreover, delay not to place yourself beyond the reach of danger; because, while you are loitering, "the door may be shut," and all entrance into it may be barred for everⁿ. It is not at all improbable that many who had derided Noah, or perhaps assisted in constructing the ark, clung to it when the floods came; and cried to Noah, "Open to us, and take us in:" and doubtless, if that were the case, Noah would pity their deplorable condition when he heard their cries or saw their unavailing endeavours. But God had shut the door; and Noah was not at liberty to open it: so that, one after another, they all "sank like lead in the mighty waters." Thus many in the last day will say, "Lord, Lord, open to us;" or "they will cry to the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb^o:" but the judgments they once despised, will come upon them irresistibly, and for ever. Cultivate then a holy fear; and enter into the ark while it continues open to you.]

3. Suffer nothing to divert you from your purpose—

[We have said that Noah incurred much odium as well as much expense in this exercise of faith. And it is certain, that you also will be called to make some sacrifices for your God. Not your reputation only, but your interests also, may be materially affected by your obedience to Christ. But what did Noah lose in the issue? What concern did he feel either about the reflections cast on him, or the labour and money he had bestowed, when he found himself safe in the ark, and saw the whole world perishing in the waters? Still less will ye feel, when we shall see the floods of divine vengeance deluging the ungodly, and yourselves, as "heirs of righteousness," placed beyond the reach of harm. Fear not then to be singular in a good cause. It is better to condemn the world by a holy singularity, and to be condemned *by* them on account of it, than to be condemned *with* them, and endure the wrath of an incensed God.]

ⁿ Matt. xxv. 10—12.

^o Rev. vi. 16.

MMCCCXXII.

ABRAHAM'S LIFE A PATTERN FOR OURS.

Heb. xi. 8—10. *By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

THERE can scarcely be proposed to our consideration any subject more important than the practical efficacy of faith. It is the one subject which pervades this whole chapter: and it is set before us in the most advantageous way that can be imagined, being exhibited in living examples, in whom it was so embodied as to be visible, as it were, before our eyes. Had the Apostle launched forth into a general description of it, we might possibly be thought to lay an undue stress on any expressions which he has used: but, when he merely refers us to historic fact as illustrative of the point, we feel, that there is no room for misapprehension on the part of any candid inquirer.

The Apostle has already adduced instances which occurred before the flood: and now he comes to specify others which took place at different and distant periods, almost to the apostolic age. At the head of these is the case of Abraham, who, both in this chapter, and in other parts of Scripture, is more celebrated for his faith than any other of the children of men. We propose to consider,

I. His conduct under the influence of faith—

It is but a partial view that we shall be led to take at present of Abraham's faith, because other, and yet more remarkable, circumstances will come under our consideration at a future time. We now notice only two things:

1. His departure from his own country—

[Whilst Abraham was in Ur of the Chaldees, God appeared to him, and said, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land which I will shew thee^a." Whether this was done in a vision, or by a voice, we are not informed: but it is clear that it was done in such a way as not to leave the smallest doubt upon Abraham's mind, that the command proceeded from Jehovah, the only true and living God. It was a command which required much self-denial: for every man naturally feels attached to his country, and his kindred, and his possessions; and, unless induced by the prospect of some great advantages, is averse to leave them. But the self-denial was the greater, because he was not informed whither he was to go: it was to a land which should afterwards be shewn him. What would all his friends and relatives think of him, when he told them that he was about to forsake them all, and did not so much as know whither he was going? Would they not account him mad? Yet did he obey, without hesitation, and without a murmur. God, at the same time that he issued this command, had engaged to "make of him a great nation," and to raise up from his loins the promised "Seed, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed^b:" and of God's power or fidelity he had no doubt^c: he therefore went forth, willingly renouncing all present comforts in obedience to his God, assured that, however despised or ridiculed his conduct might be, it would prove in the issue to be the path of happiness and wisdom.]

2. His sojourning in the land of promise as in a strange country—

[When he went forth from his own country, he took with him Sarah his wife, and Terah his father, and his nephew Lot. But though he went towards Canaan, he stopped short of it in Haran; and there abode five years, till his father's death: when he proceeded to Canaan^d, where, except when driven from it by a famine, he abode during the remainder of his days. But did he then merely change one inheritance for another? No; he had not there the smallest inheritance, "no, not so much as to set his foot on." He had not even a stationary abode; but dwelt in tents, which were moved from one place to another, as occasion required: thus avowing himself to be a mere pilgrim and sojourner there, and to be "looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." The city which he had left in his native land, and those which were in the land of promise, had their foundation in the dust, to which they would all in time be reduced: but the heavenly

^a Gen. xii. 1. and Acts vii. 3.

^c Rom. iv. 18—21.

^b Gen. xii. 2, 3.

^d Acts vii. 4.

city, which God had formed for his own habitation and the eternal residence of his saints, would continue for ever: and to that he looked as his home; content to have no abiding place here, if only he might attain to that as his eternal rest^e. Nor was it for himself only that he chose this unsettled mode of life, but for his children also, even for "Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise:" for what he desired for himself, he desired for them also, the enjoyment of the Divine favour, and the possession of an unseen, but everlasting inheritance.]

But whilst we contemplate his conduct in these respects, it will be proper to shew,

II. How far his example is a pattern for us—

It is evident that the whole catalogue of saints here enumerated is intended to illustrate the nature and efficacy of faith. Yet in considering the conduct of the individuals, we must make due allowance for the difference of circumstances, and rather mark the principle by which they were actuated, than the particular acts in which it was displayed. If, for instance, we should imagine that we were called to forsake our country and kindred in the way that Abraham did, we should greatly err. But I conceive, that, in the two following respects, all will confess we are bound to follow him:

1. The authority of God should in our minds be paramount to every other authority—

[As he "consulted not with flesh and blood," when once the Divine will was intimated to him, so neither should we: it should be sufficient for us that God hath commanded any thing: there should then be no inquiry whether the command be easy or not; nor should there be any regard to consequences in obeying it: there should be in us a fixed determination of heart to fulfil his will at all events. If, for instance, the Lord Jesus Christ say to us, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me;" we must not stand to inquire into the extent of the self-denial that may be requisite, or the weight of the cross which we may have to bear, but leave that to his wise and gracious disposal, being intent on nothing but the performance of our duty to him. If he add, that we must "forsake all, and follow him," not only not

^e Heb. xiii. 14.

loving, but actually hating, *in comparison of him*, our own nearest and most honoured relatives, yea, and “our own lives also,” we must not reply, “This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” but must set ourselves instantly to fulfil in all its extent whatever he has required of us. If men, who know not God, despise, and revile, and persecute us, we must be ready to welcome it all for his sake; and to reply to the menaces of the most ferocious adversaries, “Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.” In a word, we must spare no pains to ascertain the mind of God; and, that once learned, neither men nor devils should deter us from labouring to fulfil it.]

2. The interests of the eternal world should be paramount to every other interest—

[Abraham had never seen the heavenly city; but, in the hope of reaching it, he counted all earthly possessions, interests, or pleasures, as unworthy of notice. We too are ignorant of what awaits us in the eternal world: we have no conception of the glory that shall be revealed to us at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. But by faith we may even now get such views of it, that all earthly glory shall vanish before it, as the stars before the meridian sun. How empty did all the glory of Egypt appear to Moses, when he had respect unto the recompence of reward which awaited him in a better world^f! And to St. Paul all his accumulated afflictions appeared lightness itself, whilst he looked, not at “the things which are visible and temporal, but at those which are invisible and eternal^g.” And thus it will be with us: it will be a small thing to us that we have no inheritance here, or even that we are called to give up an inheritance we already possess. We shall even “take joyfully the spoiling of our goods, knowing that we have in heaven a better, and an enduring, substance^h.” We shall contentedly live as pilgrims and sojourners here, and seek our rest only in the world above.]

Let us then take occasion from this subject to inquire,

1. Whether we be children of Abraham—

[Our blessed Lord has told us, that, “if we be Abraham’s children, we shall do the works of Abrahamⁱ.” Do we then *these* works? Do we in these respects “walk in the steps of Abraham^k?” Inquire what authority has God’s word with you? Do you set yourselves to obey every command of his as soon as you know it? and are you anxious to know his will in

^f ver. 26.

^g 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

^h Heb. x. 34.

ⁱ John viii. 39.

^k Rom. iv. 12.

order that you may obey it? Inquire also, what influence the world has over you? If you belong to Christ, though you are *in* the world, you are not *of* it: "you are not *of* the world, even as Christ was not of the world¹:" you love it not, nor any thing that is in it: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, are shunned by you as ensnaring, and despised by you as unsatisfying^m." "The very friendship of it you avoid, as enmity with Godⁿ:" you "come out from it^o;" and will "not be conformed to it^p:" you are even "crucified unto it, and esteem it as a crucified" object in your eyes^q. Say, is it thus with you? and do you regard it thus in reference to your children, as well as unto yourself; contented that your children after you should live in tents, if only they may attain an everlasting inheritance? The description of all true Christians is, "They walk by faith, and not by sight^r." And surely it is no difficult thing to ascertain what your habits are in this respect. Oh! remember, that if you are not Abraham's sons, you have another father, even the devil. This may sound harsh; but it is the declaration of Him who "spake as never man spake^s." I pray you, leave not such an interesting subject any longer in suspense: nor rest till you have given evidence that you are "Abraham's seed," by walking as Abraham "walked, and as Christ himself also walked^t."]

2. How you may become so—

[It was by faith that Abraham was brought into a justified state: and by faith are we also to be made partakers of that happiness. By our works we must *prove* our relation to him; but by faith only can we *obtain* an admission into his family. We must believe in the promised Seed, as he did; and then shall we be Christ's, as he was: "And, if we be Christ's, then are we Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise^u." Now it is of the utmost importance that we understand this matter well. For there are many who imagine, that to sequester themselves from the world is meritorious, and to live as monks or hermits is to secure the favour of their God. But this is a fatal error. There is no acceptance with God but by Jesus Christ, even by faith in his atoning blood. The Apostle especially guards us on this head. Abraham was circumcised: yet his righteousness came not by circumcision, but by the faith which he had whilst he was yet uncircumcised^x. So it is not by any obedience of ours that we are to purchase an inheritance in heaven; we must receive it as the free gift of God

¹ John xvii. 14—16.

^m 1 John ii. 15, 16.

ⁿ Jam. iv. 4.

^o 2 Cor. vi. 17.

^p Rom. xii. 2.

^q Gal. vi. 14.

^r 2 Cor. v. 7.

^s John viii. 38—44.

^t 1 John ii. 6.

^u Gal. iii. 6, 7, 29.

^x Rom. iv. 9—11.

through Christ Jesus; and then press forward towards it in the way of his commandments. Let us walk with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in this world, and then we shall "sit down with them for ever in the kingdom of our God."]

MMCCCXXIII.

THE PRACTICAL EFFICACY OF FAITH.

Heb. xi. 13. *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

THE precepts contained in Scripture may be supposed to admit of a latitude of interpretation favourable to the views of those who profess to regard them; but the examples that are recorded there, exhibit a light, which the ingenuity of man in vain attempts to obscure. Who that reads the history of the patriarchs, and the commendations bestowed upon them, can doubt the efficacy of faith to produce obedience, or the nature of that obedience that ought to be produced? After all the allowance that must of necessity be made for a diversity of situation between them and us, the principle by which they were actuated remains the same, and its operation also must be the same, as far as the circumstances in which we are agree with theirs. It is manifest that the catalogue which is here given us of holy men, was not recorded merely for the sake of historical information, but for our instruction in righteousness, and as an incentive to imitate their virtues. The passage before us relates to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who alone "had opportunity to return to the country which they had left:" confining therefore our attention to them, we shall shew,

I. Wherein they excelled—

From the account given of them in the text, we are led to admire,

1. The strength of their faith—

[They were taught to expect a numerous seed, and the possession of the land of Canaan: and, together with these temporal blessings, others of a far sublimer nature were promised; namely, a descendant in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed; and an everlasting inheritance in heaven — — — These promises they did not see accomplished: yea, not even the temporal blessings did they receive: for in the space of two hundred and forty years their posterity *in the promised line* amounted to but seventy; and Jacob, after sojourning as a stranger in Canaan, died in Egypt. But the patriarchs “walked by faith, and not by sight;” and, notwithstanding all their discouragements and delays, held fast their confidence even unto death: “they all died in faith.”]

2. Its practical effects—

[Expecting higher blessings than this world could afford, they disregarded the things of time and sense as of little value — — — They considered themselves as mere “pilgrims and sojourners on the earth,” and repeatedly “confessed” this to be their true and proper character^a. This correspondence between their principles and their practice marked both the sincerity and efficacy of their faith, and was, in fact, their highest commendation.]

It will be easily seen from hence,

II. Wherein they should be imitated—

We are certainly not required to resemble them in their wandering unsettled kind of life; but we should imitate them,

1. In the state of their minds—

[We have promises, as they also had; and promises which yet remain to be fulfilled to us. God has not only assured us of acceptance with him in and through his beloved Son, but has engaged to send his Holy Spirit into our hearts, for the carrying on and perfecting his work within us. We meet with many delays and difficulties, which at times disquiet our minds, and lead us almost to doubt the truth of the promises themselves: but we should “against hope believe in hope:” yea, we should “hold fast the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end.” If God be true to his word, and able to perform it, “not one jot or tittle of it can ever fail.” Convinced of this, we should say, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”]

2. In the habit of their lives—

[The name “pilgrims and strangers” was not given to the patriarchs merely on account of their sojourning in a strange

^a Gen. xxiii. 4. and xlvii. 9.

land; for David, after he was established on his throne, and had subdued all his enemies on every side, assumes the same title^b; and the same appellation is given to us also under the Christian dispensation^c. Though we are not called to dwell in moveable habitations, we, as much as the patriarchs themselves, should answer to the character of pilgrims. We should feel only indifference to the things of this world — — — We should be daily advancing towards the heavenly world — — — And we should look forward to death as the consummation of all our happiness — — —]

^b 1 Chron. xxix. 15.

^c 1 Pet. ii. 11.

MMCCCXXIV.

THE CHRISTIAN'S DESIRE.

Heb. xi. 16. *Now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God.*

WHEREVER the Gospel is faithfully declared, it is generally known that we are to be saved by “the same faith as that which dwelt in our father Abraham:” but it is not so generally understood, that we are to “walk in the steps of Abraham;” and that, in the most self-denying acts of his life, he was intended to be an example to us^a. But in its fruits, as well as in its object, our faith must resemble his. Now, amongst his most eminent virtues we must reckon his superiority to the world, in that he willingly left his own country to “sojourn in the land of promise, as in a strange land;” and continued, with Isaac and Jacob, to the very end of his days, to walk as a pilgrim and a sojourner there, in the assured hope and expectation of a better country, which he had in view^b. Both he and his family “had opportunities in abundance to return” to their own land, if they had been so disposed: but they knew themselves to be under the Divine guidance and direction; and regarded nothing in comparison of God’s favour, and the ultimate possession of that recompence to which they had respect.

^a Rom. iv. 12.

^b Heb. xi. 8—10.

In them, then, we may see,

I. The character of every true Christian—

The Christian seeks a better portion than this world can give him—

[He is *in* the world, and performs the duties of his station, like others: and, as to external appearance, he differs not materially from the sober part of mankind. He does not make an unnecessary parade of his religion; nor does he affect needless singularities: but he moves quietly and unostentatiously in the sphere which God has assigned him. But, in “the spirit of his mind,” he is widely different from every unconverted man. “His affections are set on things above, and not on things below^c.” He sees the emptiness and vanity of all earthly things: he has weighed them in a balance, and found them wanting in every respect. He has seen how uncertain they are, both in the acquisition and enjoyment; how wholly unsatisfying to a spiritual mind; and how soon they pass away. Heavenly things, on the contrary, he has found to be every way worthy of his pursuit: and he has determined, through grace, to disregard every thing in comparison of them. He has learned to regard this world as a mere wilderness; a land through which he is passing to his own *native* country^d; the country where his Father dwells, and which is the place of his ultimate abode. The conduct of the patriarchs gives, in this respect, a just idea of the Christian. They dwelt in *tents*, and not, like those around them, in cities: and thus they shewed to all, and indeed *avowed*^e, that they were travelling towards a better land. Thus the Christian takes not up his rest in any thing here below; but shews, by the whole of his spirit and conduct, that he is indeed looking for “a better country, that is, an heavenly.”]

In this he is distinguished from all other persons whatsoever—

[Others may be weary of the world through disappointment and vexation; or they may feel an indifference towards some things that are in it. But there is no man, except the Christian, that is uniformly and universally dead to the world, at the same time that he has every opportunity to enjoy it. No person, but the true Christian, compares the two worlds together, so as to give a deliberate and determined preference to that which is above. The glories of the eternal world are seen by none but him, and therefore are coveted by him alone. Others, in their *judgment* indeed, will acknowledge the superior

^c Col. iii. 2.

^d *πατρίδα* conveys this precise idea, ver. 14.

^e Confessed, ver. 13.

excellence of the eternal world: (in truth, there is no man so stupid and brutish as to entertain a doubt of it:) but in their hearts they do not love it; and in their lives they do not seek it. The true Christian, on the contrary, does seek it above all. And in this there is no difference to be found between saints of any country, or any age. The mind of the Patriarchs is the mind of every Christian under heaven. The same sentiment prevails among the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, the healthy and the dying. There may be a difference in many points both of faith and practice: but in this there is none. Every individual that is truly converted to God will say, "I am a stranger with thee and a sojourner, as all my fathers were^f."

If the Christian be exalted in his character above others, so also is he in,

II. The high honour conferred upon him—

God is, by way of eminence, *his* God—

[Jehovah is the God of all the universe: there is not a creature in heaven, earth, or hell, that is not subject to his controul. But he is in a peculiar manner the God of those who consecrate themselves to him, and endeavour to walk according to his will. This is particularly declared in reference to the point before us; a separation, in mind and spirit, from the unbelieving world. "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and *I will be their God; and they shall be my people*^g." See what God was to Abraham: how he conversed with him as a friend; admitted him to the closest fellowship; heard and answered his prayers; protected him from every enemy; and finally admitted him to his beatific presence in heaven. Thus will he do to all, who, like Abraham, endeavour to maintain a constant fellowship with him. Yea, whatever God himself possesses, even all his own infinite perfections, shall be employed in behalf of the believing soul, as much as if there were not another creature in the universe to engage his attention. Thus will he do, I say, in this life: and, in the life to come, "he has prepared for the heavenly-minded Christian a city," a *fixed* habitation, a habitation suited to him, and *worthy of God himself*.]

^f Ps. xxxix. 12.

^g 2 Cor. vi. 16—18.

Nor will God be ashamed to *avow himself* his God—

[God would be utterly ashamed to acknowledge a worldling as standing in such a relation to him; just as we should to acknowledge as our friend and favourite a notorious robber, or an abandoned prostitute. The worldling does “rob God” in ten thousand respects. He robs him of his heart, his time, his service^h: and commits whoredom and adultery, as the Scripture expresses it, with every base thing which solicits his regardsⁱ. How is it possible that God should approve of such base proceedings, or profess himself the friend of such worthless creatures? Our Lord tells us, that “of those who are ashamed of him, he will be ashamed, when he shall come in the glory of his Father with his holy angels^k.” He will turn from them with indignation, saying, “Depart from me; I never knew you.” But of a faithful servant, neither God the Father, nor the Lord Jesus Christ, will ever be ashamed. On the contrary, “both the Father and the Son will come to him, and make their abode with him^l.” Indeed, God rather loves to be called his God, and chooses to be designated by that very name. When Moses asked of God, by what name he should make him known to the children of Israel, God replied, “Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel; the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you. *This is my name for ever; and this is my memorial unto all generations^m.*” Individual believers indeed are not, nor can be, mentioned in Scripture, as these patriarchs are: but it is as true of one as of another: and God will put no difference between one and another, any further than the fidelity of each individual shall justify a distinction in his behalf.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who set their hearts on earthly things—

[How unlike are you to the saints of former days! Compare your life, or rather your *spirit*, with that of the persons mentioned in my text. Do not mistake, as though *their* call was peculiar, and nothing resembling it is given to you. I know you are not called to go out from your country, and to dwell in tents: but you are called to “desire a better country,” and *that* supremely; yea, and not only to *desire* it, but to *seek* it; to seek it with your whole hearts. And is there not just occasion for you to seek it? Compare the present with the future world: can you doubt which should have the

^h Mal. iii. 8.

ⁱ Jam. iv. 4.

^k Mark viii. 38.

^l John xiv. 23.

^m Exod. iii. 15.

preference in your esteem? You cannot. Why, then, do you not act agreeably to your convictions? Do you not know, that you can never have any hope of heaven, if you do not *desire* it: you can never possess it, if you do not labour for it? I must further say, that, if you will not be the Lord's people, you can have no hope that he will give himself to you as your God. You are afraid, perhaps, that your names will be cast out as evil, if you renounce the world, and live in it as pilgrims and sojourners. To be ridiculed as righteous overmuch, is, in your eyes, too formidable an evil to be encountered. But, if you are ashamed to be called God's servants, will not he be ashamed to be called your God? No doubt he will: and I wish you to consider this, ere it be too late. Without a surrender of yourselves to him, you can never hope that he will give himself to you.]

2. Those who are endued with patriarchal virtue—

[There are some, I trust, who, like the patriarchs, desire, and shew too by their lives that they do “desire a heavenly country.” Go on, beloved, in your heavenly way; and whatever opportunities be afforded you to go back, regard them not: yea, if even the fiercest opposition be made to you, let it not impede your course one moment. What if people despise, and hate, and persecute you, shall that be suffered to divert you from your purpose? Do you not remember what is said of our Lord, that “for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross and despised the shame, and is set down on the right hand of the throne of Godⁿ?” Do ye, then, walk in his steps; and, like him, in due time you shall “inherit the glory prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”]

ⁿ Heb. xii. 2.

MMCCCXXV.

ABRAHAM OFFERING UP ISAAC.

Heb. xi. 17—19. *By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*

THE whole life of the patriarchs was an apt illustration of the life of faith; because, when they had abundant opportunities of returning to the country

from whence they had come out, they refused to do so, and preferred living as strangers and pilgrims in a foreign land, testifying plainly to all around them, that they regarded not this world as their home, but were in pursuit of a better, that is, an heavenly country^a. The Apostle, having shewn us this, returns to the case of Abraham, of whose faith he had already spoken in terms of high commendation, but whose principal act of faith remained yet to be noticed, as being the most illustrious exercise of that grace which the world had ever seen. This we are now to consider: and it will indeed be found profitable to mark,

I. The wonderful transaction here recorded—

God issued a command to Abraham to offer up his son—

[This was such a command as was sufficient to confound his reason, and to excite in his mind a doubt whether it could proceed from a God of truth and love. The account is given us in the 22d chapter of Genesis, where all the circumstances that attended it are recorded. Abraham had had a son given to him in his old age, when neither he nor his wife, according to the common course of nature, could hope for any progeny. This son was constituted the appointed medium for bringing into the world “the Seed, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed.” Yet this son was Abraham to take, and with his own hands to offer him up a burnt-offering to the Lord. Upon the delivery of this command, we might suppose him almost of necessity to say, Can this proceed from God? Can he not only take away thus the life of an innocent youth, but require me, the father of that youth, to be his executioner? Surely the suggestion comes rather from Satan, who seeing that this youth is to be the progenitor of the Messiah, the Redeemer of the world, would take advantage of my desire to please God, and make me his instrument to defeat the purposes of the Almighty, by destroying the very person to whom the promises are made. But he had no doubt whence the voice proceeded; and therefore]

This command he instantly set himself to fulfil—

[He “conferred not with flesh and blood:” he listened not to the dictates of carnal reason, nor consulted for a moment the judgment of his wife; but addressed himself to his arduous

^a ver. 13—16.

duty with *readiness*, with *perseverance*, and with a *fortitude* that was invincible. "He rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him^b." But so distant was the appointed place, that he reached it not till the third day. What a time was here for meditation and reflection! and what conflicts may we suppose him to have experienced in his soul between parental love and duty to his God! Yet he persevered: yea, when the beloved youth, seeing in his father's hands the knife that was to slay the sacrifice, and the fire that was to consume it, put to him the touching question; "My father, behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" still he maintained his resolution; and, waving any direct answer to it, proceeded to the place. There, no doubt, he revealed the matter to his son, who acquiesced in the Divine appointment; and then, having laid the wood in order, and bound his son, raised the knife to inflict the fatal wound. With what more than human firmness must he have been endowed, to execute an act so revolting to all the feelings of his nature, and so likely to transmit his name with infamy to the remotest posterity! How was it that he acquired strength to perform the act? We are told,]

In the execution of it he was animated and upheld by faith—

[To this principle his obedience is expressly ascribed: "By faith he offered Isaac." Mere reason would suggest to him, that, in destroying his son, he would annihilate the hopes of the whole world, founded as they were on the progeny that should hereafter spring from his loins. But by faith he was so persuaded both of the truth of God in his promises, and of his power to accomplish them, that he hesitated not to obey the Divine mandate; assured that, though his son were slain and burnt to ashes, God would rather raise him up to life again than suffer one jot or tittle of his word to fail. What though no instance of such an interposition had ever yet existed? that was no reason that it should not exist, if it were necessary to the performance of the Divine promises. Indeed an interposition little short of that, had already existed in the very birth of Isaac, who had been given to him, when neither he nor Sarah could, according to nature, have any hope of an offspring: and as Omnipotence had given that son in accomplishment of a promise, so the same Almighty Power both could, and would, restore him even from the dead.

^b Gen. xxii. 3.

Nor was he in this respect disappointed of his hope: for, in the moment his hand was lifted up to slay his son, God arrested his arm, and forbad the execution of his purpose, accepting the will for the deed, and accounting that as actually done which in an instant of time would have been irrevocably done, if the same authority that enjoined it had not interposed to prevent it: so that Abraham is always spoken of as having actually offered up his son; and as having, “in a figure, received him again from the dead.”]

Now, as in this transaction there are several different points to be attended to, so will there be a corresponding diversity in,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

We may learn,

1. *From his trial*, the use and intent of trials—

[God is said to have “tempted Abraham.” But we are not to understand from this that he did any thing with a view to lead Abraham to the commission of evil: in that sense “God never tempts any man: and if any man be drawn to the commission of sin, it is only through the influence of his own in-dwelling corruptions^c.” But God gave him this command, in order that it might be seen, both by Abraham himself and by the world at large, whether he had grace to execute it. God, in all his dispensations towards the Jews in the wilderness, had the same object in view, as Moses informed them at the commencement of their journeying in the wilderness^d, and afterwards reminded them just previous to their entrance into Canaan^e. He warned them also that at all future periods they must be on their guard not to be drawn aside from Jehovah by persons pretending to a divine authority, even though they should work miracles in confirmation of their word, or utter prophecies that should eventually come to pass; for that God would suffer such impostors to arise, in order to put their fidelity to the test, and to give them an opportunity of evincing what was in their hearts^f. God himself indeed needed not for his own information such events; for he knew what was in man, whether it was brought forth into act, or not: but they themselves could know it only by seeing the actual operation of their own principles: and therefore, for the comfort of some, and the humiliation of others, he suffered their principles to be brought to the test, and afforded by his own dispensations an occasion for their internal graces or

^c Jam. i. 13, 14.

^e Deut. viii. 2.

^d Exod. xvi. 4.

^f Deut. xiii. 1—3.

weaknesses to display themselves^g. It is for the same end that God at this day suffers obstacles of various kinds to be put in the way of his people; he does it, that their faith may be tried; and that, if it stand the trial, redoubled benefits may accrue unto them^h. Know ye then that these temptations, which are to so many an occasion of falling, are intended of God to be to you an occasion of approving your fidelity to him. The prospect of some advantage, or of the gratification of a forbidden appetite, presents itself to you: and by it God says, "Now, which will you prefer, my honour or your own lust? Look to it, that you be steadfast in your obedience to me." In like manner, when persecution arises because of the word, or when any who profess godliness make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience, it is all permitted by God, as far as you are concerned, on purpose to detect your hypocrisy, if you are unsound at heart; or to evince the steadfastness of your faith in him. Make then this improvement of every temptation, that you may come out of it as gold from the furnace, and prove by means of it "the sincerity of your loveⁱ."

2. *From the graces which carried him through it, the different offices of faith and fear—*

[The particular end of this temptation was, to discover whether Abraham truly "feared God^k:" and God acknowledges that that point was by the obedience of his servant clearly ascertained. Now by "fear," is meant such a reverential awe of the Divine Majesty, as swallows up all other considerations, and determines us to fulfil God's will at all events. It annihilates all other fear, and constrains the soul to reply to its persecutors, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye; for I cannot but proceed in my duty to him, though the whole world should combine to oppress me^l." But fear alone would be ineffectual to prevail in so great a warfare: therefore faith comes to its aid; and presents to the mind the promises of God; the promise of effectual aid in the conflict, and of an abundant recompence after it. Without this succour, our spirit would soon fail: but under an assurance that God will fulfil his word, we are enabled to go forth "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," and to defy the whole universe to "separate us from the love of Christ." The two should always be united; the one to operate as a stimulus, and the other as an encouragement. If either be wanting, our obedience will be very imperfect: it will want that holy reverence which we should ever maintain even in the midst of our most exalted joys, or

^g 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

^h 1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.

ⁱ 2 Cor. viii. 8.

^k Gen. xxii. 12.

^l Acts iv. 19, 20.

that filial confidence which so peculiarly pleases and honours God. See then, brethren, that, however difficult the service be which God requires of you, it be performed resolutely and without delay. Let no consideration under heaven weigh with you, any more than the dust upon the balance, in opposition to any known command. And whilst you labour to obey God's precepts, hold fast his promises with a confidence that nothing can shake. Listen not to any carnal reasonings, however specious they may be, when once you know what the word of God requires. Duty is yours: events are God's. Labour you to execute your part; and leave him to fulfil his, in his own way, and in his own time. Let it suffice for your encouragement, that "he is faithful who hath promised;" and, that "what he hath promised he is able also to perform."]

3. *From the issue of his trial*, the benefit of approving ourselves faithful to our God—

["By this act of his he was justified." As a sinner, indeed, he had been accepted of God forty years before, as soon as ever he believed in that promised "Seed who was to descend from him, and in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed:" and in that sense he was justified by faith only^m. But St. James says truly, that "he was justified by works also, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar"; for by that act he was justified in his own conscience, and justified before the whole world. A tree may be good: but how shall it be known to be good but by its fruit? It is then only perfect when it is laden with fruit, and thus demonstrated to be good. And Abraham, though previously pardoned and accepted by his God, was then proved and evidenced to be a righteous character, and in a state of acceptance with God, when by this astonishing act of obedience he displayed the reality and efficacy of his faith. From that time he was honoured with that glorious appellation, "The friend of God:" and, for his farther encouragement, God confirmed all his promises to him with an oath^o; that by these two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, he might have the stronger consolation. Nay more, his Isaac, whom, in his mind and purpose, he had sacrificed, was now restored to him: and O! to what unspeakable advantage! What delight would he henceforth feel in a son so given, and so restored to him as from the dead!

And shall we find it in vain to sacrifice any thing to the Lord? Shall we not, in proportion to the greatness of our sacrifices, and the willingness with which they have been

^m Rom. iv. 3—5, 9—11, 20—22.

ⁿ Jam. ii. 21—23.

^o Gen. xxii. 16.

offered, have an evidence in our souls that we are in favour with God? Will not the very exercise of such grace demonstrate to us the truth and efficacy of the grace we have received? And, when we have shewn such love to God, can we entertain any doubt of God's love to us? Shall we feel any difficulty in concluding, that, if we have so chosen and loved God, "he has first chosen and loved us?" Moreover, God will give unto us the witness of his Spirit, assuring us that we are indeed his children, and his friends^q. This is what St. Paul has plainly taught us to expect: He tells us, that "tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience^r; (that is, an evidence arising from trial, such an evidence as the gold has of its purity after having stood the trial of the fire;) and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us^s." Fear not then, any of you, to sacrifice your very Isaac to the Lord, if called to it. The trial may be painful at the time, but "it shall be to your praise and honour and glory, as well as unto the praise and honour and glory of your God, at the appearing of Jesus Christ^t."]

4. *From the typical aspect of the whole*, the transcendent love of God to man—

[It is said, that "Abraham received Isaac from the dead in a figure^u." This expression many interpret as importing that the whole of this history was a type or figure of our redemption by Christ. Whether that be the true import of the expression or not, I can have no doubt but that the whole transaction was typical of that most astonishing and incomprehensible mystery, the gift of God's only-begotten Son to "die for our sins, and to be raised again for our justification." Behold, then, the love of God in this! Do we admire the obedience of Abraham to the Divine command? O! what shall we say of the love of Almighty God, who, without any necessity on his own part, or any solicitation on ours, gave his only-begotten Son, not to die by a wound which inflicted pain only for a moment, but under the curse due to sin, even to the sins of the whole world? From all eternity did he ordain this sacrifice; and never drew back from his purpose. When his Son entreated with strong crying and tears to have the cup taken away from him, it was not removed; but was given him to drink, even to the dregs. With his own hand too did the Father inflict the fatal wound: yes, "it pleased the Lord Jehovah to bruise him^x." For Isaac, the Lord accepted a

^p John xv. 16. 1 John iv. 10.

^q Rom. viii. 16. 1 John iii. 24.

^r δοκιμὴν.

^s Rom. v. 3—5.

^t 1 Pet. i. 7.

^u ἐν παραβολῇ.

^x Isai. liii. 10.

substitute, a ram caught in the thicket: but no substitute was found for the Lord Jesus Christ, seeing that he himself was the substitute for a guilty world: and, in token that his sacrifice had made a full atonement for sin, he was raised from the dead, and exalted to heaven, to carry on and perfect there the work which he had begun on earth. What shall we say to this love? The height, the depth, the length, the breadth of it, how unsearchable! how utterly incomprehensible! Turn then your eyes from Abraham to Abraham's God: or, if you look at Abraham at all, let it be not so much to admire, as to imitate, his obedience. "He saw by faith the day of Christ, and seeing it, he rejoiced;" and counted no sacrifice too costly wherewith to honour him. Your views of Christ, and of the Father's love in him, are incomparably clearer than ever Abraham's were: and therefore, if it be possible, your obedience should be proportionably more prompt, more self-denying, and more firm. Let then every lust be sacrificed to God without reserve, and every interest too that may stand in the way of your duty to him. So shall you be children of Abraham indeed, and be acknowledged the friends of God by him, who will reward every man according to his works.]

MMCCCXXVI.

MOSES' CHOICE.

Heb. xi. 24—26. *By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.*

IT is a great advantage to us to be conversant with the Holy Scriptures, not only because from them we learn the principles of religion, which can be derived from no other source, but because we see in them examples which have upon them the stamp and impress of God's approbation, and which therefore we cannot presume to disapprove. Had any individual of the present day acted as Moses did in the instance before us, we should, I doubt not, have all agreed in condemning him as inconsiderate, enthusiastic, and unwise. Not knowing his motives, or not giving him credit for them, we could not

have formed a correct judgment of his actions: but we are sure that the choice which Moses made, however absurd it might appear to those more immediately connected with him, was truly commendable. In bringing it before you, I shall endeavour,

I. To explain it—

Two things must here be noticed :

1. His conduct—

[He was, next to Pharaoh, the first man in the whole land of Egypt, having been adopted by Pharaoh's daughter as her son, and being regarded as such by Pharaoh himself. All the pleasures, the riches, and the honours that man could possess, with the exception only of the imperial diadem, were within his reach, or rather he was in the actual enjoyment of them. Yet the whole of these did he renounce: and not at a season when by reason of youth he was unable to form a just estimate of them, or by reason of age was incapable of enjoying them, but in the very prime of life, at the age of forty, when he had arrived at full maturity both of body and mind^a: and when, from "being learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians^b," he was able to relish them with a zest, which a vulgar and uninstructed mind knows nothing of, and which nothing but refinement can bestow. All these he sacrificed voluntarily and with a determined purpose, "refusing" to be recognised any longer under the august character of Pharaoh's daughter, and choosing rather to appear in his own proper character as a child of Abraham.]

Whilst Moses was in this exalted station, his brethren according to the flesh were suffering under the most grievous oppression. To unite himself with them, was to subject himself to all the reproach and cruelty under which they groaned. Yet he acknowledged them as his kindred: and voluntarily participated with them in their lot: descending thus at once from the highest eminence in the kingdom to the lowest state of degradation and infamy.]

To obtain a just view of this conduct we must notice,

2. The principle from which it proceeded—

[We are told that he acted thus "by faith." By faith, he saw that the Hebrews were exclusively "the people of God;" and that, as such, whatever they might endure from man, they were and must be happy; since God, the God of the whole earth, was their God, and esteemed them as his own peculiar treasure. He saw too, that the reproach that was cast upon

^a Exod. ii. 11. Acts vii. 23.

^b Acts vii. 22.

them was "cast upon them for the sake of Christ," in whom they professed to believe as their future Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Had they chosen to intermarry with the Egyptians, and become one people with them, they would have suffered nothing from Pharaoh, but would have fared as the rest of his subjects: but, holding fast their regard for Abraham as their father, and their expectation of Christ as to spring from one of his descendants, they exposed themselves to all the injuries which an envious, cruel, and despotic monarch could inflict: so that their reproach was properly "the reproach of Christ," Christ himself being the object of it, and suffering it, as it were, in the person of his people^c. He saw yet further, that the afflictions which they endured for Christ's sake should in due time be recompensed; and, that all who participated in their sufferings, should partake also of their reward. As the patriarchs looked by faith to a heavenly city, and a heavenly country, so did Moses look to a heavenly reward; in the prospect of which he was willing to forego all that this world could give him, and to sustain all that his most potent and malicious enemies could inflict upon him. Indeed in this view he esteemed reproach to be "riches," "great riches," yea, "greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt."]

But as the wisdom of this conduct may be doubted, I shall proceed,

II. To vindicate it—

It may be thought that this measure was unnecessary, inexpedient, and absurd: but,

1. It was not unnecessary—

[Circumstanced as he was, it became him to act as he did. He was, I grant, greatly indebted to Pharaoh's daughter: and he was bound to regard her with all the duteous affection which belonged to the relation into which he had been adopted by her. But his duty to the God of Abraham was paramount to every other: and he would have sinned, if he had merged his fidelity to God in his regards for any creature whatsoever. All the pleasures which he had enjoyed, however innocent in themselves, were "pleasures of sin," as long as he continued to acknowledge the God of the Hebrews as his God, and the faith of the Hebrews as his faith. The neglecting to confess his God was, constructively, to deny him: and, if he continued any longer to deny God, he could expect nothing but to be denied of God in the day of judgment. The measure therefore which he adopted was not unnecessary, but absolutely necessary, both for his peace in this world, and his happiness in the world to come.]

^c See Acts ix. 4. Col. i. 24.

2. It was not inexpedient—

[It might be supposed, that if he had continued, like Joseph, at the head of the Egyptian government, he might have mitigated their sorrows, even though he should never be able to effect their release. But he had a secret intimation from God, that the time of their deliverance drew nigh, and that he was to be the instrument by whom they should be delivered. And so strong was this impression upon his mind, that he engaged in the work rashly and prematurely, without any direction from God; and thereby reduced himself to the necessity of fleeing to a foreign land, to avoid the punishment to which his own unwarrantable temerity had exposed him^d. The question in his mind was, What duty to his God required? and he was not at liberty to calculate then on matters of expediency, or to weigh in the balance of carnal reason the possible or probable issues of different events. His duty was to obey God; and to leave to God to save his people in his own time and way, according to his own infallible and eternal counsels.]

3. It was not absurd—

[Moses looked beyond the concerns of time, and acted with eternity in view. He knew that his pleasures, riches, and honours, how great soever they were, were only “for a season;” and that the afflictions to which he was about to subject himself, were also “for a season” only; whereas the recompence which his sacrifices would insure him, was eternal. What comparison then could there be between these things? or what room was there for hesitating one moment which he should prefer? If he gained the whole world, what would it profit him, if he lost his own soul? or if, by sacrificing the whole world, his soul should be saved, what reason could he have to regret the sacrifice? His choice then was that which sound wisdom dictated, and true piety inspired.]

In truth, this is no other choice than what all the Prophets and Apostles in their respective ages have approved. David “would rather be a door-keeper in the house of his God than dwell in the tents of ungodliness^e.” And why? Because, as he tells us in another psalm, “A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked^f;” better in its possession, better in its operation, better in its end. Solomon was of precisely the same mind^g. St. Paul, like Moses, actually “suffered the loss of all things, and accounted them but dung, that he might win Christ^h.” Having made a sacrifice of every thing, so far was he from feeling himself impoverished by his

^d Acts vii. 24—29.

^e Ps. lxxxiv. 10.

^f Ps. xxxvii. 16.

^g Prov. xv. 16, 17.

^h Phil. iii. 8.

loss, that, "when he had nothing, he accounted himself as possessing all thingsⁱ;" and actually "took pleasure in all his necessities and distresses, from a consideration of the benefit which would accrue from them to himself, and the glory to his Lord and Master^k." St. Peter confirms this view of the subject most fully, and in terms too which are peculiarly applicable to the case before us: for he declares, that the sufferings of God's people are "Christ's sufferings;" that from them arises much honour to God, and much benefit to the soul; and that they are rather to be accounted grounds of joy, than occasions of sorrow and regret^l. To these I will only add the testimony of our Lord himself, who, in the epistle to the Church of Smyrna says, "I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty; but thou art rich^m."

After such testimonies as these, we cannot but approve the conduct to which our text refers.]

From this subject then we may SEE,

1. How erroneous are the views of worldly men!

[The men of this world set a high value on the things of time and sense, whilst sin appears in their eyes but a light and venial evil. By them, suffering is more dreaded than sin: and the loss of an opportunity of honouring God is of no account in comparison of the loss of great honours and great emoluments. They will strain every nerve to combine the irreconcilable services of God and mammon: and, if the one or the other must be sacrificed, they will hold fast their pleasures, their riches, and their honours, instead of parting with them for the Lord, "To forsake all and follow Christ," is to them a hard lesson, which they cannot, and will not, learn. But the example of Moses must be followed by us all, so far at least as our circumstances are similar to his. We must all confess Christ openly before men. We must all unite ourselves to his people, and take our portion with them. Whatever cross may lay in our way, we must take it up cheerfully, and bear it after him, "going forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproachⁿ." We are not indeed of necessity called to renounce the highest distinctions: because they may be held, and the most important offices in the state may be executed, in perfect consistency with our duty to God; as no doubt they were by Daniel: but if the hope of acquiring eminence, or the fear of losing it, deter us from the performance of any duty, or lead us to a compliance with any sin, we are then called to take the decided part that Moses did, and to forsake all for Christ. Let us then not seek great things

ⁱ 2 Cor. vi. 10.

^k 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

^l 1 Pet. iv. 12—14.

^m Rev. ii. 9.

ⁿ Heb. xiii. 13.

either for ourselves or our children: or, if we possess them, let us not seek our happiness in them, but in God alone. If we possess not his favour, though we had kingdoms in our possession, we are poor: but if he be our God, then, though bereft of every thing else, we are rich.]

2. How blessed they are who live by faith!

[True it is that the whole of their life is foolishness in the eyes of unconverted men: and they must of necessity meet with many reproaches and persecutions for the truth's sake. But, notwithstanding all that they are, or can be, called to endure for righteousness' sake, *the very worst of their portion is better than the best of the portion of ungodly men*: the best that the world can give, is its treasures: and the worst that the believer can receive, is its reproaches and persecutions: yet is the reproach which the believer sustains for Christ's sake, greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. How superior then must the believer's portion be in the eternal world! If the believer in a dungeon is richer, and happier, than the unbeliever on a throne, what must his portion in heaven be when compared with the unbeliever's in hell! Be not dejected, then, ye who are despised or persecuted for Christ's sake, but by faith view your privileges, and expect your reward. Our blessed Lord has set forth the worst of your portion, and pronounced you in the midst of all "blessed." And he has set forth the best of the unbeliever's portion, and denounced nothing but "woes" against him in the midst of all°. Take but eternity into your estimate of things, and have respect unto the recompense of your reward in heaven; then will every sacrifice be small, every suffering light, every service easy. In such a frame you will rejoice to suffer shame for Christ's sake, and account death itself, though of the most violent and cruel kind, a subject of desire rather than of fear, of self-congratulation rather than of sorrow^p.]

° Luke vi. 20—26.

^p Phil. ii. 17.

MMCCCXXVII.

FAITH SEEING THE INVISIBLE GOD.

Heb. xi. 27. *He endured, as seeing him who is invisible.*

NOT any one of all the catalogue of worthies in the Old Testament, not even Abraham himself, stands higher than Moses; who, when possessed of all that rank and affluence could confer on man, abandoned

it all, that he might participate the lot of his oppressed and persecuted brethren. He was assured, indeed, that God would compensate to him all the losses which he sustained; and "he had respect to the recompence of that reward." But he would not have been able to maintain his stand as he did, if he had not found a *present* support from God. On his first attempt to deliver Israel, about forty years before, he had failed, partly through precipitation, in killing the Egyptian, and partly through fear, in fleeing from the grasp of his enraged enemies. But now he maintained his steadfastness, and executed his commission with undaunted courage; because he saw, by faith, that God who is invisible to the eye of sense: "he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible."

This remarkable expression will lead me to shew,

I. The peculiar faculty with which believers are endowed—

By nature, they possess no other faculty than is common to the unregenerate world: and to represent piety as proceeding from, or as indicative of, a new *sense*, is to open a way for the grossest enthusiasm, or rather for the entire exculpation of all who do not possess it: for, a man who never possessed the sense of seeing or hearing could contract no criminality whatever by acting as one who was blind or deaf. Yet, if I may be allowed to follow the paradoxical expression of my text, the believer has a faculty peculiar to himself, a faculty of "seeing" an object that is invisible, even "God himself, who is invisible."

Believers do see the invisible God—

[God, it is true, is, in his essence, invisible: "he dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto; and no man hath seen him, or can see." Yet does faith bring him so powerfully before the mind of believers, that they may be said to "see" him; because they are as much assured of his presence, as if they beheld him with their bodily eyes. We all know the effect of glasses of different forms; either as magnifying an object, so as to make it visible, notwithstanding

its smallness; or as bringing it near to us, notwithstanding its vast distance, within the reach of our visual organs. I mean not to say that there is any just comparison between these artificial aids and faith; but, when we consider what we ourselves can effect by such helps, we may, without any great difficulty, imagine the power which God himself has given to faith.]

They have a realizing sense of his presence with them—

[It is manifest that Moses saw God with him, just as Elisha “saw the chariots of fire and horses of fire” that encompassed him. Thus does every believer, in proportion as his faith is lively and operative, view God present with him. God is with his people, as a witness, to observe their conduct: he is with them, as a protector, to deliver them from danger: he is with them, as a provider, so that, “though lions do lack and suffer hunger, they that serve him shall want no manner of thing that is good.” He is with them, too, as a comforter, who will make their consolations to abound above all their afflictions: and as a rewarder will he recompense into their bosom all that they either do or suffer for him. In all these views, Moses, no doubt, beheld him: and to the very end of time will he thus reveal himself to all his believing people.]

This being their exclusive privilege, I will proceed to state—

II. The advantage they derive from it in the divine life—

From this realizing view of the Divine presence, believers obtain,

1. Firmness in acting—

[Moses was undaunted by the menaces of Pharaoh^a. Nay, more: he, in his turn, warned Pharaoh, that all the first-born of Egypt, even of Pharaoh's own household, should die that very night; and that the very courtiers around the throne should come bowing to him, and entreating him with all the children of Israel, to depart out of the land: and that then he *would* go, whether Pharaoh should consent to it or not^b. Such is the firmness which a sense of the Divine presence will give to every believer. Whoever it be that threatens him, or whatever the threat contain, his answer will be, “Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but do the things which God

^a Exod. x. 28, 29.

^b Exod. xi. 4—8.

has required of us^c." Thus it was that faith operated in the Hebrew Youths. In vain was the furnace lighted before them: they could not be diverted from their purpose to serve the Lord. Their reply to the enraged monarch was decisive: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods^d." Trials to the same extent are not at this day experienced amongst us: but there will be enough to prove the courage of all who profess to serve the Lord: and whilst the unbelieving are intimidated and turned back, the true believer will "endure, as seeing Him that is invisible."]

2. Composure in suffering—

[It was no grief to Moses that he had given up all the treasures of Egypt, or that he had undertaken to "suffer affliction with the people of God." "The yoke of Christ to him was both light and easy." And thus it is to every true believer. The Apostles, when beaten for their fidelity to Christ, "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake^e." And Paul and Silas, with their feet in the stocks, and their backs torn with scourges, "sang praises to God at midnight^f." Thus, in all cases where a man has a realizing sense of the Divine presence, the cross which he has to bear, is rather a ground of glorying than of complaint^g, and causes him to "rejoice and leap for joy^h." The light of God's countenance lifted up upon him, infinitely more than counterbalances any bodily pains; so that, however his afflictions may abound, his consolations outweigh them all.]

3. Confidence in conflicting—

[Moses, as we have seen, had no doubt about the issue of the contest between him and Pharaoh. And to every true believer this will be a self-evident truth: "If God be for me, who can be against meⁱ?" Extremely animated is the prophet's description of this state of mind: "The Lord God will help me: therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint; and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me: who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me: who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old like a garment; the moth (the weakest creature in the universe) shall eat them up^k." To this effect St. Paul speaks at large, defying all the creatures in the universe to separate him

^c Acts iv. 19, 20.

^d Dan. iii. 17, 18

^e Acts v. 41.

^f Acts xvi. 25.

^g Gal. vi. 14.

^h Matt. v. 12.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 31.

^k Isai. l. 7—9.

from the love of Christ¹. So, let the weakest of true believers be able to say, "I have set the Lord always before me;" and he may confidently add, "Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved^m."]

Let me now ADDRESS,

1. The timid—

[“Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy Makerⁿ!” Is he not present with you, as well as with others? or, “Is his ear heavy, that he cannot hear; or his hand shortened, that it cannot save?” Dishonour him not by unbelief. Consider how awful will be the fate of “the fearful and unbelieving, when they shall take their portion in the lake of fire and brimstone^o,” and “fear not him who can only kill the body, and after that has no more that he can do; but fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell: yea, I say unto you, Fear him^p.”]

2. The enduring saint—

[How was God glorified in Moses, when he thus braved the wrath of Pharaoh, and took on him the charge of carrying the whole nation of Israel to the promised land! His extremities were great: but was he ever forsaken? Was not the sea opened for him; and manna rained down from heaven; and water given him from the stricken rock? Go ye then forward; and know, that “your strength also shall be according to your day^q.” Your trials may succeed each other, like the waves of the sea: but “he that endureth unto the end, the same shall be saved^r.”]

¹ Rom. viii. 33—39. ^m Ps. xvi. 8.

ⁿ Isai. li. 12, 13.

^o Rev. xxi. 8.

^p Luke xii. 4, 5.

^q Deut. xxxiii. 25.

^r Matt. xxiv. 13.

MMCCCXXVIII.

MOSES' FAITH IN RELATION TO THE PASSOVER.

Heb. xi. 28. *Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.*

PERSONS, when speaking upon the comparative excellences of faith and works, are very apt to overlook the relation which they bear to each other: whereas there is no true faith which is not productive

of good works ; nor are there any works truly good, which do not proceed from faith as their root and principle. Supposing that they could exist separately, the preference might justly be given to good works : because they are the end, whilst faith is only the means to that end. Detach from each other the root and fruit of a tree ; and no one will hesitate to prefer the fruit. But they cannot be separated ; they are to each other as the cause and effect : and in proportion as any one values good works, he ought to value faith, as their originating and productive cause. True it is that there are works which are reputed good, and which may be done by an infidel or a heathen : and these, imperfect as they are, are certainly better than a barren and inoperative faith : but works that are truly good can proceed from faith alone : and the peculiar excellence of faith is, that it is the spring and source from whence all good works proceed ; and from whence they will naturally proceed, as its genuine fruit and offspring. It is on this account that the Apostle accumulates in the chapter before us so many instances of a lively faith. A person ignorant of true Christianity would expatiate only upon the works : but the Apostle traces the streams to the fountain-head ; and fixes our attention upon that faith from whence they flowed.

In considering the faith of Moses as recorded in the text, we shall mark,

I. The particular act by which it displayed itself in him—

God had determined to destroy the first-born both of man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt, with the exception of those belonging to his own oppressed and afflicted people. But when the destroying angel should be sent forth to execute this judgment, how should the Hebrews be distinguished by him ? And how should he know where to strike, and where to forbear ?

For the preservation of his people God appointed peculiar means—

[The whole account is given us in the twelfth chapter of Exodus. A lamb was to be killed by every family of the Hebrews. Its blood was to be poured forth into a bason, and to be sprinkled with hyssop upon the lintel and the side-posts of their doors; (not upon the threshold; for that sacred blood was not to be trampled on by any:) and the flesh of the lamb was to be eaten, (not raw, or sodden, but roast with fire,) with bitter herbs, and with certain forms, which it is not to our present purpose to specify. The blood so sprinkled was to serve *to them* as a pledge of their security, and to the angel as *a token* that he was to pass over that house which was so protected. And in remembrance of this deliverance, the ordinance so instituted was ever after to be called the Passover.]

These means Moses used in faith—

[He gave the necessary directions to the Jewish people, who instantly carried them into effect. In this both Moses and the people shewed the power of faith. Moses doubted not but that in the space of a few hours God would inflict the threatened vengeance on all the first-born of Egypt: nor did he doubt but that the simple means proposed would prove effectual for the preservation of the Hebrews. He did not attempt to station any centinel at the door of one single family for the purpose of calling the attention of the angel to the blood that had been sprinkled; but with perfect confidence addressed himself to the observance of the ordinance that had been appointed, having no thought that any other precaution was necessary, nor any fear that the destroying angel would through ignorance or inadvertence exceed the commission he had received.]

And these means proved effectual—

[At midnight the judgment was executed throughout all the land of Egypt, so that there was not a single house wherein the first-born was not dead, even from the first-born of Pharaoh himself to the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon. But of the first-born belonging to Israel, not one was hurt; “the destroyer had not touched so much as one of them.”]

Without dwelling unnecessarily upon this peculiar act, by which faith displayed itself in Moses, I shall proceed to notice,

II. The corresponding act by which it is to shew itself in us—

The whole human race, as transgressors of the law, are obnoxious to the wrath of an avenging God.

But God has appointed means of safety to all who will make use of them in faith. He has sent his own Son to die a sacrifice for sin; and has appointed HIM to be the only means of our preservation.

We are to seek deliverance through him, precisely as the Hebrews did through the paschal lamb—

[This is told us by St. Paul, who says, "Christ our Pass-over is sacrificed for us^a," thus identifying the Lord Jesus with the paschal lamb as the type, of which HE is the great antitype.

Now the first thing we have to do, is to sprinkle our souls with his blood. There is no other protection than this for any human being. We may bring all the good works which ever were wrought by any mortal man, and they will not avert the stroke of divine justice. No means will suffice, but those which God himself has appointed. Whether we see any suitableness in the means or not, they are to be used, and used in faith. Nothing is to be substituted as more conducive to the end; nothing to be added, to increase the efficacy of this simple ordinance. The Lamb of God is slain: his blood is poured forth: we are by faith to sprinkle it on our souls, assured that, when we have put ourselves under that safeguard, "there can be no condemnation to us^b;" but that, "Christ will be to us as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land^c." If we attempt to substitute any thing for this, or to add any thing to it, we destroy its efficacy altogether, and render it of no avail^d.

We must also feast upon the flesh of this great Sacrifice, in token of the full confidence which we have in our safety through him, and as the means of deriving fresh supplies of strength from him. How strongly has our blessed Lord himself inculcated this truth; "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you^e." We must eat it indeed, "with the bitter herbs" of repentance, and "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth^f." But we must eat it as "a feast," yea, as "a feast of fat things^g;" and we shall then find it a source of all needful strength unto our souls^h.]

We shall then find in him the same security—

[Of all the first-born that belonged to Israel, the destroyer "touched not" so much as one. And who ever perished, after

^a 1 Cor. v. 7.

^b Rom. viii. 1.

^c Isai. xxxii. 2.

^d 1 Cor. iii. 11. Gal. v. 2—4.

^e John vi. 53—56.

^f Exod. xii. 8. with 1 Cor. v. 8.

^g Isai. xxv. 6.

^h Isai. xxv. 4.

having fled to Christ for refuge, and sprinkled their souls with his atoning blood? In what instance did the destroyer ever overlook the sign, or the sign prove an ineffectual guard against his uplifted arm? If Christ be “a propitiation for the sins of *the whole world*,” and his blood be able to cleanse from *all* sin, then may all trust in him as “able to save them to the uttermost; nor shall any one that trusts in him be ashamed or confounded world without end.”]

Here then we SEE, in a striking point of view,

1. In what an awful state they are who neglect the Gospel of Christ!

[The people of Egypt, unconscious of the impending judgment, or unconcerned about it, retired to rest as secure as usual. But at midnight, when they were all asleep, it came upon them; so that “there was a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt: for there was not a house where there was not one deadⁱ.” In that instance the cry was amongst the survivors. But amongst ourselves, when persons are summoned to their great account, there is no apprehension excited, lest they should have fallen as monuments of God’s wrath. We mourn the loss of them as relatives; but as for the vengeance that may have seized them in the midst of their security, we think not of it. But of the thousands that are daily swept away, how fearful is the doom of the generality! What shrieks, what cries are uttered by them on their first entrance into the presence of their God! Could we but hear one of them, O how would it pierce our inmost souls! Yet, if we did hear it, our terror would operate with no more abiding effect, than did that of the Egyptians; who no sooner found that the Israelites were “entangled in the land,” than they pursued after them with the most vindictive wrath to destroy them. But, beloved, know that the judgments of God will be executed, whether ye believe it or not. Your presumptuous security will avail you nothing. What did it avail the antediluvian world? Did not the deluge come the very same day that Noah entered into the ark? and did not all experience the fate which they had been warned to expect? Yes; every day and hour brought it nearer to them: and in like manner “your judgment also lingereth not, and your damnation slumbereth not^k.” Awake then from your slumbers, ye foolish virgins, ere the Bridegroom come: and as ye know not at what hour he will come, lose not another in fleeing from the wrath to come, and laying hold on eternal life.]

2. How happy and secure they are who truly believe in Christ!

ⁱ Exod. xii. 30.

^k 2 Pet. ii. 2—5.

[Realize to yourselves one moment the different states of the Israelites and the Egyptians on that night, when the angel was spreading death and destruction all around him. Behold the consternation that pervaded all the families of Egypt; and then look within the houses of the Hebrews, and behold their serenity and joy. O what a contrast! And all through the influence of faith! So it is at this hour with those who truly believe. They know what judgments are coming on the whole world of the ungodly: they know, that they themselves deserve them, as much as any other persons whatsoever: they know, that nothing which they can do can avert the stroke of Divine justice: but they know that God has appointed means of safety: they know that, however inadequate according to our vain conceits the means may be to the end, they are, and shall be, effectual to all who use them in faith: they are conscious that they have used them; and that they renounce every other ground of hope, and place their dependence solely on the blood of the Paschal Lamb. They are feasting too from day to day on the flesh of that Paschal Lamb; and they have no wish but to cast off the yoke of Egypt, and to prosecute their journey to the promised land. The peace which others have, if it may be called peace, is owing to their disbelief of their danger: but the peace of the godly arises from their view of the sufficiency of Christ to save them, and of the faithfulness of God to all who hope in his promised mercy. Take ye then, my beloved brethren, the Israelites for your example. Take them *at that precise moment*, with "their loins girt, and shoes on their feet, and staves in their hands, and eating their sacrifice in haste," ready at any instant to obey the Divine mandate, and to go forth to Canaan under the Divine guidance and protection. Then shall ye be Christ's disciples indeed: and then "shall ye eat, whilst others are hungry; and drink, whilst others are thirsty: then shall ye rejoice, whilst others are ashamed; and sing for joy of heart, whilst others cry for sorrow of heart, and howl for vexation of spirit¹."]]

3. With what delight we should all welcome the return of this day^m!

[To the people of Israel this day was enjoined to be observed even to the latest generations as the most memorable day in the whole year. And well might that night be termed, "a night to be much observed unto the Lordⁿ." Methinks, the annual return of it, to those who bore in remembrance the mercies then vouchsafed to them, could not fail of filling their

¹ Isai. lxxv. 13, 14.

^m This conclusion is adapted only to *Easter Day*, on which the twelfth chapter of Exodus is read as the First Lesson for the day.

ⁿ Exod. xii. 42.

souls with the most lively joy, since then, and not till then, was their deliverance complete. But what was *their* redemption when compared with that which *we* have experienced, and which was completed as on this day, when our Lord and Saviour rose from the dead? Till then, he himself lay a captive in the grave: but then he triumphed over all his enemies, and “led captivity itself captive.” If you say, ‘True, but my enemies still live and are mighty; and they still follow me, and will reduce me again to my former bondage;’ fear not; for though they will follow you, they shall not prevail against you; and shall only follow, in order that God’s power may be the more magnified in their final destruction. Assert then your liberty: go forth under the Divine protection: harbour no unbelieving fears. Is there a sea before you? it shall open, and afford a dry path for your feet. Is there then nothing but a dreary wilderness before you, where you will be exposed to all manner of dangers and necessities? Fear not; for “you shall dwell on high: your house of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given you, and your waters shall be sure: your eyes too shall behold your King in his beauty; they shall behold the land also that is very far off.” Are ye laden with any measure of Egyptian gold? Bring it forth with you, and consecrate it to the service of your God. It was with that that Moses furnished the tabernacle of old: and God will make use of your talents also, whatever they may be, for the enriching of his sanctuary, and the advancement of his glory. Come then, ye who know the value of redemption, and pant after perfect liberty; and behold the Paschal Lamb, now already roasted by the fire of God’s wrath, and set before you, as it were, on the table of the Lord. There is the very Paschal Lamb: come feast upon it with love and gratitude: eat it, and be satisfied: eat it, and be strengthened: eat it, and live for evermore: for Christ himself invites you: “Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up to the enjoyment of it at the last day: for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.”]

° Isai. xxxiii. 16, 17.

MMCCCXXIX.

THE WALLS OF JERICO THROWN DOWN BY FAITH.

Heb. xi. 30. *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.*

HOW intelligent creatures should be affected by any principle, is easy to be conceived; because the

human mind is susceptible of the strongest impressions from every thing that is submitted to its consideration. But what connexion any principle can have with inanimate creatures, any farther than through its influence on human agents, does not at first sight appear. Take the principle of *love*, for instance. We may love the flowers which are growing in our garden: but any farther than our love operates to secure attention to those flowers, they will be altogether unaffected by it. But there is a peculiarity in the principle of *faith* which does not attach to any other principle whatever; namely, that it has respect to God, and calls forth his power; and is therefore capable of influencing every thing, whether in heaven or earth. A surprising effect of it is mentioned in reference to the walls of Jericho, which, through its powerful operation, were thrown down.

In speaking of faith as illustrated by that event, we shall be led to notice,

I. Its distinguishing properties—

Wherever a living faith exists in the soul, it will approve itself by,

1. A patient observance of the appointed means—

[The means appointed for the capture of that fortress were certainly very peculiar. The Israelites, who were encamped against it, were to walk in procession around it seven successive days in perfect silence; the trumpets only blowing. On the seventh day, they were to go round it seven times, and then to shout: and at the precise moment that they shouted, the walls were to fall, and open for them a free passage into the city. These means they used. They did not pour contempt upon them as unsuited to the end: nor did they grow weary in the use of them: nor did they attempt to add any thing to them. They felt that it was not for them to canvass the wisdom of God's appointments, but to obey them: and therefore they followed implicitly the Divine command^a, and “compassed the city seven days.”]

Such is universally the operation of true faith. God has appointed means for the salvation of the soul. He requires that we should repent of all our past sins; that we should believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as having offered an atonement

^a Josh. vi. 1—16.

for sin; and that we should give up ourselves to Christ, to be washed by his blood, and to be renewed by his Spirit. In order to further this work within us, he has prescribed means to be used by us both in public and in private: in public, we must attend on his ordinances; because, as he is peculiarly honoured by them, so he is pleased to make them in a more especial manner the channels of his gracious communications to our souls: in private, we must read his blessed word, and meditate upon it, and pray over it; and, through the influence of his Spirit, endeavour to mortify the whole body of sin. We are not to be questioning the use and efficacy of these means, but to use them in obedience to our God. True faith will not say, like Naaman, "Are not Abana and Pharpar better than all the waters of Israel? and may I not wash in *them* and be clean^b?" but it will go to Jordan, according to the direction given, and expect the blessing only in the use of those ordinances which God has prescribed.]

2. A confident expectation of the promised end—

[At the appointed time the Jewish army "shouted," not doubting but that they should see the predicted event accomplished^c. In all the instances of faith recorded in this chapter, this is a very prominent feature. Noah believed that he should be saved in the ark: and Abraham believed that Isaac should be restored to him even from the dead.

Thus it is at this day. Faith never questions either the power or veracity of God: it assures itself, that "he is faithful who has promised;" and that what he has promised he is "able also to perform." It is not from *the means* that faith expects the end; but *from God*, in and by the means. The adequacy of the means to the end comes not within its contemplation. If a posterity, innumerable as the stars of heaven, is promised to Abraham and Sarah, they consider not their own advanced age, but believe, that the promise, however improbable according to the course of nature, shall be fulfilled. Though the promise, after it was first given, was deferred for twenty years, they still hold fast their faith, and expect its accomplishment in due season. Thus shall we also, whatever difficulties may arise in our Christian course, expect a successful issue, assured, that "none who come to God through Christ shall ever be cast out," and that "of those whom the Father has given to Christ, not one shall ever be plucked out of his hands." This is the very description which the Prophet Isaiah gives of faith as to be exercised under the Christian dispensation: "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God! we have waited for him, and HE WILL SAVE US: this is the Lord; we have waited

^b 2 Kings v. 12.

^c Josh. vi. 20.

for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For in this mountain (the Church) shall the hand of the Lord rest; and Moab (the representative of all the Church's enemies) shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill: and he shall spread forth his hands in the midst of them, as he that swimmeth spreadeth forth his hands to swim: (*making the very resistance of his enemies the means of advancing his own glory:*) and he shall bring down their pride together with the spoils of their hands: and the fortress of the high fort of thy walls (be they even as strong as those of Jericho,) shall he bring down, lay low, and bring to the ground, even to the dust^d."]

In addition to the properties of faith, our text leads us to notice,

II. Its sure effects—

If exercised to the end without wavering, it will surely issue in,

1. The believer's triumph—

[Down fell the walls of Jericho at the appointed moment, and its garrison became an easy prey to the Jewish army. And what is there which the believer cannot effect under its influence? "If he have but faith as a grain of mustard-seed, he can remove the most deep-rooted mountains with a word, or plant a sycamore-tree in the depths of a tempestuous ocean." Nothing can stand before it. Mountains of guilt, though so high as to reach unto the heavens, are "cast by it into the very depths of the sea^e." Lusts, though deeply rooted as hell, shall be plucked up^f, and the tender plants of divine grace have stability, and growth, and fruitfulness amidst all the storms and tempests, whether from without or from within, that can disturb and agitate the soul^g. Does Satan summon all his forces to withstand its power? He finds the believer inaccessible to his assaults^h, and is put to flight before himⁱ: and in a little time "he shall be bruised under the feet" of the least and weakest of God's people^k. "All things are possible to him that believeth," because his faith brings down Omnipotence to his aid; so that, though earth and hell combine against him, he sets them at defiance, and is "more than conqueror over all^l." See this exemplified in the combat of David and Goliath. In the eye of sense, it was impossible for David to succeed:

^d Isai. xxv. 9—12. The image of swimming is worthy of particular notice.

^e Mic. vii. 19. ^f Rom. vi. 14 Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

^g Heb. xiii. 9. ^h Eph. vi. 16. ⁱ 1 John v. 18.

^j Jam. iv. 7. ^k Rom. xvi. 20. ^l Rom. viii. 37.

in the eye of faith, it was impossible for him to fail. The issue is well known: the stripling slew the giant, and cut off his head with his own sword. And so shall the weakest stripping among the soldiers of Christ prevail, making the very weapons of his adversaries the means of advancing and completing his own triumphs.]

2. The glory of God—

[The whole land of Canaan trembled at this event, just as they had before done at the report of all the wonders which had been wrought in Egypt^m. Had any thing been left for the Jewish army to execute, the glory might, in appearance, have been shared by them: but when nothing but a shout proceeded from them, the work was manifestly the Lord's alone.

And thus it is that God will work in behalf of all who trust in him. He makes our faith the measure of his communications, saying to us, "According to your faith be it done unto you." It is owing to our want of faith that we behold so few manifestations of his power and grace: "He does not many mighty works amongst us because of our unbeliefⁿ." But where faith is in exercise, he honours it with peculiar approbation, passing by all other graces that are combined with it, and commending faith alone: "O woman, great is thy faith;" "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace^o." This is the grace which, above all others, honours God; and, as "they who are strongest in faith give most glory to him^p," so to those who exercise it he will not fail to give the brightest discoveries of his glory: for what he said to Martha, he says to every one of us, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God^q?" Yes, he does say it, and will fulfil it, not only in the progressive triumphs of his grace, but in the ultimate and everlasting possession of his glory. Men may deride our expectations, as it is probable the men of Jericho, after a few days, did the harmless processions of the Jewish hosts: but God will in due time make bare his arm, and gain himself the glory and the victory.]

We will now endeavour to IMPROVE this subject,

1. In a way of caution—

[Every one imagines that he has faith. But, if we come to inquire into the objects and grounds of men's faith, we find it for the most part, nothing but presumption. They expect heaven; but not in the way of God's appointment, but in some way of their own, which he has never prescribed. Instead of repenting deeply of their former sins, and fleeing to

^m Josh. ii. 10, 11. with vi. 27.

ⁿ Matt. xiii. 58.

^o Matt. xv. 28. Luke vii. 50.

^p Rom. iv. 20.

^q John xi. 40.

Christ for refuge, and living in the constant observance of public and private ordinances, according to God's command, they are supine and careless, as if nothing at all was to be done by them as evidential of their faith. Now I would ask, what would have been the event, if the Jewish army had proceeded on this plan? Suppose they had said, 'We think it absurd to look for the destruction of this fortress by faith alone: we will form a trench round the city, and batter it down with the implements of war:' would they have succeeded? Or suppose they had said, 'We will expect the city to fall, as God has said; but to what purpose are these repeated processions? We shall spare ourselves that fruitless trouble, which will only expose us to the derision of our enemies:' Or suppose they had said, 'We will use the appointed means; but in order to make success doubly sure, we will form a trench, which shall both add to our security, and prevent their escape:' Do we imagine that on any one of these plans they would have been crowned with success? We feel no hesitation in saying, that they would have been disappointed of their hope; because they proceeded not according to the commands of God: yea, we doubt not but that the wrath of God would have broke forth against them, as it did on Uzza, because David in carrying up the ark was inattentive to the order that Moses had prescribed^r. Know then that, however confident our expectations of heaven be, they will end in disappointment, if we presume to alter, or neglect, or add to, the means which God himself has ordained. I pray you all to consider this: you especially, who have never yet repented in dust and ashes; you who have never given yourselves to reading, and meditation, and prayer; you who are not yet daily prostrating yourselves at the foot of the cross, and relying on Christ as your only hope; I beseech you to consider, how awfully you delude your own souls, whilst you promise yourselves the enjoyment of the heavenly Canaan. The same too I must say to those, who, whilst they profess to rely on Christ, are making their own works either a joint ground of their hope, or a warrant for their faith in Christ. Your victory can be gained only in the way that it was gained at Jericho: you must use all the means which God has enjoined, without either taking from them or adding to them: but you must expect success from God alone, and be content that he alone be glorified.]

2. In a way of encouragement—

[Many are discouraged because of their own extreme weakness, and because, though they have diligently used the appointed means, they seem not to have advanced at all, or to

^r 1 Chron. xv. 13.

have any nearer prospects of success. But what if Israel had yielded to such discouragements, and ceased from their labours before their work was done? True it is, that the precise time for the interposition of Jehovah was made known to them; but it is concealed from you: nevertheless it is as much fixed in the Divine counsels with respect to you, as it was to them: and “in due season you shall surely reap, if you faint not.” What if you are unequal to the task; was not the sound of rams’ horns, and the shout of the people, weak? Only be content to be weak, and you will then be strong; because “God will perfect his own strength in your weakness.” See how God himself chides, yet supports, your fainting mind^s — — — And see what a frame of mind, though in the midst of all your conflicts, you are privileged to possess^t — — — Follow then the advice which God himself gives you; and, “though walking in darkness, stay yourselves upon your God.” And, if still unbelieving fears arise, chide yourselves, like David, and say, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God^u.” In a word, let this saying sink down into your ears, and animate and sustain your souls; “Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper^x.” Only go on a little longer in a patient continuance in well-doing, and the victory is yours; and glory, and honour, and immortality are yours also.]

^s Isai. xlix. 24, 25.^t Isai. l. 7—9.^u Ps. xliii. 5.^x 2 Chron. xx. 20.

MMCCCXXX.

RAHAB CONCEALING THE SPIES.

Heb. xi. 31. *By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.*

FAITH is usually considered merely as an assent to testimony; human faith having respect to human testimony, and divine to that which is divine. Hence the subject of faith is supposed to lie within a small compass. But there is not a more comprehensive subject within the whole circle of man’s duties: for whilst faith has respect to every thing which God has spoken, it operates in every thing which man does.

The chapter before us shews how inexhaustible the subject is. Faith was the one principle by which all the saints there enumerated were influenced: and in every distinct instance its operations were widely different: so that, though in appearance the same subject is brought under discussion, it is presented to us in so different a light as to assume a new character.

In considering the fate of Rahab, we shall be led to shew,

I. To what it had respect—

The whole account of Rahab is continued in the second chapter of Joshua: and to that chapter we must refer as forming the groundwork of this discourse — — — It will there be found, that, though she was an inhabitant of Canaan, and had in her earlier life been notoriously dissolute, she was now a believer in the God of Israel. What she had heard of him had fully convinced her, that he was the only true God. This she openly avowed to the spies whom she had received: “The Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath^a.” But it was not in a mere general way that she acknowledged Jehovah: she had just and distinct views of him; and had respect to,

1. His purposes as sure—

[She knew that God had “given to Israel the land” of Canaan for their inheritance^b: and that his purpose respecting it should infallibly be accomplished. As the Creator and Governor of the universe, he had a right to dispose of every thing in it: and, having transferred the land to Israel, he would surely invest them with the possession of it. Thus will true faith present God to our view as a mighty Sovereign, who orders every thing both in heaven and earth. It will discover him to us as having shewn distinguishing favour to his peculiar people, in that, whilst he has passed by the angels who sinned, and left the greater part of mankind also in utter darkness, he has revealed to *them* a Saviour, yea, and “revealed him *in* them” also as the hope of glory^c. He has also prepared an inheritance for them from the foundation of the

^a Josh. ii. 11.

^b ver. 9.

^c Gal. i. 16.

world, even the heavenly Canaan; and called them to take possession of it as his special gift, through the merits and mediation of his Son Jesus Christ^d. The manner of taking possession of it also he has ordained, even by faith in Christ; by whose blood they shall be justified, and by whose Spirit they shall be renewed. All this will faith regard as unalterably fixed in the Divine counsels; so that those who possess the first-fruits here, shall infallibly reap the harvest of salvation in a better world^e.]

2. His perfections as unbounded—

[Whilst she was convinced that his power was irresistible, she, though of an accursed race and of an abandoned character, had no doubt but that God's mercy would extend even to her, if she sought it with her whole heart. Hence of her own accord she received, and hid, the spies, and dismissed them in peace, in hopes that she and her family might be spared: and all the security she required was, an oath in Jehovah's name, that no evil should be inflicted on her, when the threatened vengeance should be poured out on all beside. And is she not here also an example to us? Yes: by faith we must survey him in all his glorious perfections: we must view him as a God of all grace, whose mercy is infinite; who delights in the exercise of mercy; who "waits to be gracious" to the very chief of sinners, "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin," and following them with this tender expostulation, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." To this our faith should have especial respect; because it is our great encouragement to seek his face. To know that "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin;" that "whosoever cometh to God by him shall in no wise be cast out;" and that "where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound;" to know this, I say, and to realize it by faith, is the richest consolation which a broken-hearted sinner can enjoy. At the same time we should, like her, assure ourselves, that "God's counsels shall stand, and that he will do all his will:" we should bear in mind the records of his former interpositions, and from them be convinced that "there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord^f." *Theoretically* indeed we do acknowledge this: but how few feel it practically! How few are so impressed with the idea as to despair of escaping his wrath, but by casting away the weapons of their rebellion, and laying hold on his proffered mercy!]

^d Rom. vi. 23.

^e 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.

^f Prov. xxi. 30.

But this part of our subject will come more properly before us, whilst, in our further investigation of her faith, we shew,

II. How it operated—

From the instance to which the text directs our attention, we see, that it operated in a way,

1. Of holy fear—

[Rahab did not merely participate the terror which had seized all the inhabitants of Jericho, a terror that served only to harden their hearts, but a fear associated with a consciousness of her demerits, and a determination to seek for mercy. And, till this is wrought within us, there is no true faith in our souls. The very first work of the Holy Spirit is “to convince us of our sins;” to shew us our desert and danger; to make us sensible that “we are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Till we are brought to the condition of those on the day of Pentecost, who “were pricked to the heart,” and with a deep sense of their guilt and misery cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” there is nothing done effectually towards our conversion to God, nothing that can give any hope of the salvation of our souls.]

2. Of intense desire—

[Her desire of mercy swallowed up every other consideration. She forgot all which passes under the name of patriotism, conceiving that she had a prior and a paramount duty to the God of Israel. So sure was she that God’s purposes should be fulfilled, that she did not for a moment imagine that any efforts of hers to destroy the spies would at all avail for the protection of her countrymen. She saw that this was an opportunity afforded her for the preservation of her soul; and, if she let it pass unimproved, she should only involve herself in the ruin that could not possibly be averted. She therefore sided with Jehovah and his people against those who were related to her according to the flesh; and determined at the risk of her life to cast in her lot with the people of the Lord. Thus should we also postpone every consideration under heaven to the honour of God and the salvation of our souls. The love of our country is confessedly an important duty, as the love of our parents also is: but when our duty to God stands in opposition to the wishes or interests of our earthly superiors, the line of duty plainly is to serve God at all events. The direction given to the Church under the character of a spouse, is this: “Hearken, O daughter, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father’s house; so

shall the King have pleasure in thy beauty: for he is thy Lord God: and worship thou HIM^g." Our Lord's declaration to his followers is plainer still: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple^h." The kingdom of heaven is a pearl, for which faith will part with all in order to possess it.]

3. Of unreserved obedience—

[Every direction that was given her she readily complied with; and in no instance departed from the terms on which alone she was encouraged to expect mercy. Nor will any one who truly believes that he shall be an object of sparing mercy, account "any of God's commandments grievous." His determination through grace will be to be found in God's appointed way, fulfilling all righteousness, and "walking in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord blameless." One particular commandment given to her I will here notice as of more than ordinary importance, namely, that of binding the scarlet line in her window, as the memorial of her faith, and the means of her preservation. Had this been neglected, she had perished with the rest of her countrymen: but by this her safety was secured. There is a corresponding command given to every one that desires to obtain mercy, which above all he will be anxious to obey, namely, that of believing in Christⁱ, and "abiding in him," as the branch abides in the vine^k. Faith will teach him, that, if he be not found in Christ, the sword of divine vengeance will surely cut him off, as that of the destroying angel did the first-born, whose doors were not sprinkled with the blood of the paschal lamb. In a word, as soon as true faith is formed in the soul, the one inquiry will be, "Lord, what will thou have me to do^l?" and from that time the believer's desire will be to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."]

In the account given of her faith, we see,

III. What it obtained—

1. A deliverance from that destruction which came on all her unbelieving neighbours—

[In Jericho nothing that breathed was left alive, with the exception of Rahab and her family: but to them the promised mercy was vouchsafed. And who that believes in Christ shall

^g Ps. xlv. 10, 11.

^h Luke xiv. 26.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 23.

^k John xv. 4—7. The injunction to abide in him is repeated *four times*.

^l Acts ix. 6.

perish? Against the unbelieving world the deluge of God's wrath will prevail, and sink them all without exception into everlasting perdition: but to those who are in Christ, no evil shall accrue. They are in the true ark, against which the winds and waves shall beat in vain. In the great day of the Lord, there will be a separation made between the sheep and the goats; nor shall one of either flock be found through any mistake confounded with those whose nature so widely differs from his own: not a lamb shall be found amongst the goats; nor a kid amongst the sheep: but each will have the portion assigned him by the Judge of all,—the unbelievers in the lake of fire and brimstone; the believers in the regions of eternal bliss. Amongst “the chaff that shall then be burnt up with unquenchable fire,” not the smallest grain of wheat shall be found^m.]

2. A portion among the chosen people of the Lord—

[This is particularly noticed in the subsequent history of Rahab: she was incorporated with Israel, and made a partaker of all their privilegesⁿ. So, though we have been aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, we shall be made nigh by the blood of Christ, as soon as we believe in him; and from being “strangers and foreigners shall become fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God^o.” Look through the Holy Scriptures, and see all that belongs to the saints, either in this world or the next, and you will read only the catalogue of your own possessions: for “all things are yours, when ye are Christ's^p.”]

3. The transcendent honour of being brought into the nearest relation to Christ himself—

[Who would have thought that this poor Canaanite, of an accursed nation, and once of an abandoned character, should be chosen of God to be an instrument of bringing into the world the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Saviour of the world? Yet so it was: Salmon, one of the progenitors of Christ, married her: and their son Boaz married Ruth, the Moabitess, from whom descended in an immediate line Obed, Jesse, David. And will the parallel hold good here also? Shall we, on believing in Christ, become thus intimately united with him? Yes, and far more intimately; for she, *as his ancestor*, was one with him only *corporeally*; whereas by faith we become “one *spirit* with him^q.” As relating to the flesh, we are no nearer to him than others; but as relating to the

^m Amos ix. 9.

ⁿ Josh. vi. 25.

^o Eph. ii. 12, 13, 19.

^p 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

^q 1 Cor. vi. 17.

spirit, "we are members of his body, even of his flesh and of his bones^r."]]

From this subject then we LEARN,

1. How sovereign God is in the dispensation of his gifts !

[Of all that were in Jericho, we read not of any to whom true faith was given. Others, like the devils, believed, and trembled: she alone "believed unto righteousness." It is pleasing to reflect, that, amongst the most avowed enemies of God and his Christ, there may be some hidden ones, whose heart God has touched with true repentance, though their views of salvation be very indistinct; and who shall be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus, whilst millions, who have enjoyed the brighter light of the Gospel, will be cast out into outer darkness. It is a rich consolation also to know, that the most abandoned sinner in the universe is not beyond the reach of mercy; but that, as God's grace is his own, and he divides to every one severally as he will, we may all without exception look to him for mercy with a full confidence of acceptance through the Son of his love. Let any one that is discouraged through a sense of his own unworthiness, remember Rahab, and, like her, cast himself upon the mercy of the God of Israel.]

2. How certainly faith shall avail for the salvation of the soul !

[We are told by St. James, that "Rahab was justified by her works^s." But can any one suppose that the mere act of receiving the spies, and dismissing them in peace, formed her justifying righteousness before God? Assuredly not: for it was attended with great infirmity, seeing that she had recourse to falsehood to conceal her conduct, because she knew not how to trust in God to protect her from the consequences of it^t. But, imperfect as her works were, they evinced the sincerity of her faith, and proved her to be indeed in a justified state before God. If then a faith, so obscure as her's was, and so imperfect in its actings, justified her before God, let no one doubt but that a full affiance in the Lord Jesus Christ shall assuredly bring him into a state of acceptance with God, and ultimately prevail for the salvation of his soul.]

3. How certainly faith will also be productive of good works !

It is in confirmation of this sentiment that St. James adduces the examples of Abraham and of Rahab as justified by

^r Eph. v. 30.

^s Jam. ii. 25.

^t Josh. ii. 4—6.

their works. He is shewing that faith without works is dead; and that their works proved them to be possessed of a living faith. Undoubtedly her faith was, as we have before observed, not very distinct, though we doubt not but that it was afterwards enlarged, as her knowledge of the Mosaic writings increased. But indistinct as it was, it wrought, and powerfully too, yea, so powerfully as to overbalance every other consideration that could operate upon her mind. And thus it will do in every one: it will work, and effectually too, to overcome the world^u, and purify the heart^x. If then it do not evidence itself by such fruits as these, let us not imagine that we are possessed of it: if it work not thus, our faith is no better than the faith of devils. Whoever then professes to be interested in "the grace of God which bringeth salvation," let him learn from it, what it invariably teaches to all who have received it, "to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world^y." If any have this hope in him, let him walk as Christ walked, and "purify himself even as he is pure^z."]

^u 1 John v. 4.^x Acts xv. 9.^y Tit. ii. 11, 12.^z 1 John ii. 6. and iii. 3.

MMCCCXXXI.

POWER OF FAITH.

Heb. xi. 32—35. *And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.*

THIS is a surprising chapter altogether. Respecting faith, as a principle, the generality of men think but little. Indeed, a considerable degree of prejudice exists against it in the minds of many; as though it were a mere conceit, which tended to discourage all human efforts, and to generate delusions in all who give themselves up to its influence. But the account

here given of it is truly surprising. The Apostle himself seems to have been at a loss for utterance on so vast a subject. The instances of it which he had enumerated, and those which crowded upon his mind, almost overwhelmed him: "What shall I more say? for the time would fail me to declare" all that my recollection suggests to me.

That we may enter in some little measure into the Apostle's views of this divine principle, let us consider,

I. How marvellous are its records—

We will not go to the instances above recited; for then indeed the time would fail us: nor will we enter at all minutely into those which are heaped together in my text; for then also it would be impossible for us to do justice to them in one discourse. I will only, and as briefly as possible, call your attention to,

1. The persons enumerated—

[These are not placed in the order of time in which they lived; for Barak was before Gedeon, and Jephthae before Samson, and Samuel before David: the Apostle mentions them just as they occurred to his thoughts: as he did also the facts to which he afterwards refers: for they also are promiscuously specified, without any reference to the persons whom he had mentioned, or the times at which the events themselves occurred. But they all afford most astonishing instances of the power of faith. Gedeon, with only three hundred men, and with no other weapons than trumpets, and pitchers with lamps concealed in them, and these broken, with a shout, "The sword of the Lord and of Gedeon," with no other weapons, I say, than these, prevailed over all the hosts of Midian^a. Barak, with no more than ten thousand men, subdued an immense army, of whom not so much as one was left alive^b. Samson also, when the Spirit of God came upon him, slew thirty Philistines, and one thousand more with the jaw-bone of an ass, and three thousand more at his death^c. Jephthae, too, under the same divine influence, subdued the Ammonites^d. As for David, his victories were numberless. And Samuel, though not a warrior, shewed himself strongly under the influence of faith^e; as did Elijah, and Elisha, and

^a Judg. vii. 7, 19—22. with viii. 10.

^b Judg. iv. 6—16.

^c Judg. xiv. 19. and xv. 15. and xvi. 27—30.

^d Judg. xi. 23—33.

^e 1 Sam. xii. 16—25.

many other prophets in their season. If it be asked, in what respect were these examples of *faith*? I answer, All these exploits were done *in obedience to a divine impulse, and in dependence on God's promised aid.*

But, without dwelling on the acts of these individual worthies, let us notice, rather, what my text leads us to,]

2. The acts specified—

[Who would imagine that faith should ever possess such powers as are here ascribed to it? Who would suppose that by it men should “put to flight mighty armies,” and “subdue whole kingdoms?” Yet this has been done, and done by faith also: for all the kingdoms of Canaan were subdued by Joshua's faith; as were the surrounding kingdoms of Moab, and Syria, and Edom, with many others, by the faith of David. And who would think that this principle should prevail to shut the mouths of lions; yes, and to quench the violence of fire, so that a furnace heated to the utmost extent of man's ability, should not be able to singe a hair of a person's head? Yet was the former of these done by the faith of Daniel; as was the latter, by the faith of his three companions, Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-nego. Even to the raising of the dead has this availed: for, through the exercise of it, Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath^f, and Elisha the son of the Shunammite woman^g.

Now of these things I say, they are utterly incredible: and, in declaring them, I seem to demand an assent that is perfectly unreasonable. For, how should it be that such a hidden principle of the mind should ever enable a man to work such miracles as these? Verily, the whole account seems to be nothing but “a cunningly-devised fable,” that yet can impose on none who give to it one moment's consideration. But it is true, and the very truth of God. Nor will it appear incredible, if we duly consider the way in which it operates. It is God himself who engages to do the thing: and faith calls into action his Almighty arm (and with him all things are possible). So that, inasmuch as faith insures his effectual aid, it may be truly said, that “all things are possible to him that believeth.”]

But let us further notice,

II. How diversified its operations—

There is nothing to which it may not be applied, and nothing for which it will not equally avail. It will alike enable us,

I. To *do* any thing—

^f 1 Kings xvii. 17—24.

^g 2 Kings iv. 18—37.

[By it has “righteousness been wrought,” in its utmost extent. Not only has *political* righteousness been given for the government of kingdoms, as to Asa, Hezekiah, and Josiah, but *moral* righteousness, in a degree never produced by any other principle under heaven. Where do we find such characters as those recorded in the Scriptures? Yet it was faith which made them what they were: and faith, in proportion as it exists in the soul, enables every child of God to resemble them. The weakest of the human race shall “out of weakness be made strong;” and prevail, not only over men, but over all the powers of darkness also^h, if only he rely on the promise of a faithful God. His faith, though it were only small as a grain of mustard-seed, would be abundantly sufficient for all the powers that the occasion called forⁱ.]

2. To *obtain* any thing—

[By it “have promises been obtained;” even such as, according to human expectation, could never have been fulfilled. To Abraham and Sarah was the birth of a son delayed, till there remained not the smallest probability of its accomplishment, nor a possibility, according to the course of nature. And David’s establishment on the throne of Israel was as unlikely, according to man’s estimate of things, as any event that could be conceived. But never, in any single instance, did a promise, apprehended by faith, fail him who relied upon it^k. Take, then, the promises of God (no matter how great they are, or how small); and only rely on them, and plead them before God in prayer; and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than you be disappointed of your hope. “Ye may ask what ye will,” provided only it be contained in a promise, and “it shall assuredly be done unto you.”]

3. To *suffer* any thing—

[It is scarcely to be conceived what sufferings men have inflicted on the people of God. Of these we have many instances mentioned in the verses after my text^l. But, perhaps, the instance more immediately referred to in my text is one recorded in the book of Maccabees, respecting a woman and her seven sons, who endured all that the cruel tyrant Antiochus could inflict upon them; and refused all his offers of deliverance; having an assured prospect of a recompence from God, even an eternal recompence, which would infinitely outweigh all that it was in the power of man to grant^m. Similar instances we have had in our own favoured land, in the days of popish persecution: and God alone knows to what any of

^h Rom. viii. 37. Eph. vi. 16. Jam. iv. 7.

ⁱ Matt. xvii. 20.

^k Josh. xxiii. 14.

^l ver. 36, 37.

^m 2 Macc. ver. 7.

us may yet be called, before we die. But, if faith will enable men to bear up under such sufferings as we read of in the Scriptures of truth, how much more will it qualify us for sustaining the common evils of life; yea, and enable us to “glory in tribulation,” so far as God shall see fit to subject us to its assaults.]

To all this I may add,

III. How extensive its benefits—

There is not a blessing to the body or the soul, for time or for eternity, which faith will not secure. Do we not want,

1. Pardon ?

[There is not a sin of which we may not obtain forgiveness, if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, “whose blood cleanseth from all sin.” The declaration of an inspired Apostle is, “All that believe are justified from all thingsⁿ.”]

2. Peace ?

[“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ^o,” yea, by “believing in this unseen Saviour, we may rejoice in him with a joy that is unspeakable and glorified^p.”]

3. Holiness ?

[Every part of holiness will faith supply. It will “work by love,” and “overcome the world,” and “purify the heart^q.” It is by faith only that we can “behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ:” and by that shall we be “changed into his image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord^r.”]

4. Glory ?

[Never shall the believer die; never perish; never come into condemnation^s. Eternal life is his, both in title and in the actual commencement; and it shall be his in the great day of Christ’s appearing. Then shall that be said to you, as it was to blind Bartimeus, and to her who washed her Saviour’s feet with her tears; not, ‘Thine *importunity*, or thy *penitence*, hath saved thee;’ but, “Thy *faith* hath saved thee: go in peace.”]

Now, let me press upon you a due IMPROVEMENT of this subject. Concerning faith, I would say, strive,

ⁿ Acts xiii. 39.

^o Rom. v. 1.

^p 1 Pet. i. 8.

^q Acts xv. 9.

^r 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^s John iii. 16. and xi. 25, 26.

1. To ascertain its existence—

[True is that declaration of the Apostle, "All men have not faith^t." Nor is it true of those only who professedly reject the Gospel, but of multitudes also who profess to have received it. It was to such that St. Paul addressed those words: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves^u." "You are not to imagine that a mere assent to the Gospel is the faith that is required of you. Saving faith is a divine principle in the soul—a principle productive of such fruits as were brought forth by the worthies enumerated in this chapter. In order to ascertain whether your faith be genuine, read the chapter carefully; and, after every successive instance of faith, inquire how far it has operated the same change in you. In truth, if we compare our experience with that of the saints of old, the best amongst us, instead of valuing himself upon his faith, will find reason to doubt whether he has yet attained any faith at all.]

2. To appreciate its importance—

[Lightly as men in general think of faith, there is no principle whatever that is of such importance to the soul as that. Love, indeed, is in some respects greater than faith; but it must be remembered, that faith is the root from which alone true love can spring. Where faith is wanting, there can be no union with Christ, and consequently no Christian grace: for "without Christ we can do nothing." "Without faith, whatever we may do, it is impossible to please God^x;" and, consequently, without faith we can have no hope of eternal life. How terrific are those words which our blessed Lord commissioned his Disciples to proclaim throughout the world! "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not, shall be damned^y." Know ye then, that, in this subject, life and death are set before you: and that, as in this world, so to all eternity, "According to your faith it will be unto you."]

3. To obtain its increase—

[Very remarkable is the answer given by the Disciples to an injunction which they had received relative to the forgiving an offending brother. When he told them, that if a brother should offend seven times in a day, and as often repeat his acknowledgments, they should renew to him their pardoning grace, they said, "Lord, increase our *faith*^z." But what had *faith* to do with this? One would rather suppose

^t 2 Thess. iii. 2.^u 2 Cor. xiii. 5.^x ver. 6.^y Mark xvi. 15, 16.^z Luke xvii. 5.

that they would have said, "Lord, increase our *love*." But their request argued a juster view of divine truth. They did indeed stand in need of *love*; but it could spring from nothing but *faith*; and would infallibly be produced by faith: and hence they presented the fittest petition that it was possible for them to offer. Let the same petition, then, proceed continually from your lips. Unbounded are your calls for this divine principle; and the more you excel in that, the more will you excel in every Christian grace.]

4. To have it as the one governing principle of your life—

[It is "by faith you are to walk," "by faith to stand," by faith to live continually: as the Apostle says, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me^a." You have seen how wholly the saints of old gave themselves up to its influence: do ye go and do likewise; that, having lived by faith, and "died in faith," you may receive "the promise which God has promised you, even eternal life^b."]

^a Gal. ii. 20.

^b ver. 39.

MMCCCXXXII.

GOD'S ESTIMATE OF HIS PEOPLE.

Heb. xi. 38. *Of whom the world was not worthy.*

THESE words are introduced in a parenthesis; and are intended to obviate an objection, which might weaken, if not make void, the foregoing statement. The Apostle has been insisting upon the operations and fruits of faith; and has adduced a great variety of instances in which its power has been displayed.

Those who wrought such stupendous works by the power of faith might be supposed to be objects of high and deserved admiration; but those who suffered so many things under its influence might be thought to have merited their afflictions: whereas, in truth, the world itself, even that very world by which they were so persecuted, was not worthy of them.

Let us consider,

I. God's record concerning them—

It is obvious that there is an immense difference between God's estimation of his people, and that in which they are held by an ignorant and ungodly world.

The world accounts the saints unworthy of it—

[This appears from the manner in which the world uniformly treats the saints. In the days referred to by the Apostle, multitudes of the saints were tortured on account of their piety; many "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth^a." And these are the persons to whom this testimony is given, that "the world was not worthy of them."

In the days of Christ and his Apostles, the same enmity against vital godliness betrayed itself continually. Our blessed Lord, though confessedly without spot or blemish, was "despised and rejected of men:" his whole "nation abhorred him," and combined to demand his crucifixion; preferring even a murderer before him. His Apostles too, as he himself had forewarned them, were "hated of all men for his sake," and were counted as "the filth of the earth and the off-scouring of all things," precisely as the godly in the days of Jeremiah had been before them^b. St. Paul was certainly not behind any in wisdom or piety; yet of him was it said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live^c."

And is it not thus at this time also? I appeal to all, Whether the very circumstance of a person being zealously devoted to the service of his God do not uniformly bring a stigma upon his character, so that, even though he should be the most active, and benevolent, and blameless of mankind, he will be regarded as weak and noxious in that particular? If from peculiar circumstances a man of piety be led to take a prominent part in the diffusion of true religion, I ask, Will not the world account him unworthy of their esteem, their company, their protection? Let the opprobrious names which are given to such characters, and the contempt with which they are treated, and the injuries which with impunity are inflicted on them, determine this point. He can know little either of the sentiments or conduct of those around him, who does not see, that at this hour, no less than in former times, "they who are born after the flesh persecute those who are born after the Spirit;"

^a ver. 35—38.

^b Compare Lam. iii. 45. with 1 Cor. iv. 13.

^c Acts xxii. 22.

and that "the enmity of the serpent's seed against the Seed of the woman" is as strong as ever.

But, whilst the world thus accounts the saints unworthy of it,]

God, on the other hand, pronounces the world unworthy of them—

[God regards the saints as "his peculiar treasure above all people upon the face of the earth." In his estimation they are as lights in a dark world, and as "salt" which keeps the great mass of the ungodly from utter putrefaction^d. Nay further, he sends them as leaven to diffuse piety all around them^e, and to impart to others the blessings which they themselves have received. But the world is unworthy of them: for they know not their value; and are regardless of all the advantages which they might derive from them; yea, they are insensible of the benefits which they are daily receiving from them; and they requite all their kindness with nothing but hatred and contempt.

We have not time to enter minutely into these different particulars: yet we must not pass them over without a few words to elucidate and confirm them. Go back to the days of the Apostles: see in what light those distinguished servants of God were regarded: see at what a low rate all their labours were appreciated in every city, not of Judæa only, but of the whole world. What benefits might the people in every place have received, if they would have listened to the instructions and followed the examples of those holy men! So at this day might they be benefited by the saints and ministers of the Lord, so far at least as those saints and ministers are themselves conformed to the doctrines and examples of the primitive saints? Indeed the world is, though unwittingly, benefited by the saints in a very high degree: for by them the tone of morals is raised, wherever they come: and a multitude of Institutions for the temporal and spiritual welfare of mankind are set on foot; Institutions, which would never have been carried forward, if the zeal and piety of the godly had not led the way, and the envy and jealousy of the careless been provoked to tread in their steps^f. How far the words of our Lord respecting Jerusalem are applicable to the present day, I pretend not to say: but in that day, the tribulation that came on Jerusalem was greater than had existed since the beginning of the

^d Matt. v. 13, 14.

^e Matt. xiii. 33.

^f The Societies for the Diffusion of the Holy Scriptures, for sending forth Missions to the Heathen, for the Conversion of Jews to Christianity, and for the Education of the Poor, abundantly illustrate this truth.

world, insomuch that “if those days of trouble had not been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect’s sake those days were shortened^g.” And if only ten righteous men had been found in Sodom, both that city, and all the other cities of the plain, would have been spared. Who can tell then what judgments would be poured out upon the ungodly world, if the saints by their piety and their prayers did not stay the hand of an avenging God^h? But how these benefits are requited, it is needless to observe. Suffice it to say, that God’s estimation of his saints is the same as ever; and his declaration concerning them is, that “the world is not worthy of them.”]

Let us then proceed to state,

II. The sentiments with which this record should inspire us—

It should teach us,

1. To disregard the indignities that are cast upon us—

[Man has his “*day*,” but God has his also: and in the prospect of the ultimate decision of an infallible Judge, it should be a small matter to us to be judged of man’s judgmentⁱ. When men pour contempt upon us, we should say as our blessed Lord, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” In reference to the persecutors of that immaculate Lamb, the Apostle says, that “through ignorance they persecuted him,” and that, “if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” So, if men really knew what God has done for his chosen people, and how “precious their blood is in his sight,” they would not venture to oppose them in the way they do. Men are beguiled by their own prejudices: they persuade themselves that piety is hypocrisy; and that, to diffuse it, is to “turn the world upside down:” and, in opposing it, “they think they really do God service.” Towards them therefore we should feel pity, rather than resentment: and on our own account we should feel nothing but exceeding joy; since we only participate the lot of God’s chosen people^k, and are rendered conformable to the example of Christ himself^l.]

2. To adore and magnify our God, who has so distinguished us—

^g Matt. xxiv. 21, 22.

^h Gen. xix. 22.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iv. 3. the Greek.

^k Matt. v. 11, 12.

^l 1 Pet. iv. 13.

[Who is it that has made any of us to differ from the world around us^m? Verily, "he that hath wrought us to the self-same thing is Godⁿ." In ourselves we were no better than others: we were "dead in trespasses and sins," like all around us; and were "children of wrath, even as others." But he pitied us; "he looked upon us whilst lying in our blood, and bade us live^o." O how should we bless and adore him for such amazing love! "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God^p." Let us enter into the full spirit of these words of the loving and beloved Apostle: and let us never cease to call on "all that is within us to bless" and magnify our adorable Benefactor^q.]

3. To walk worthy of our high and heavenly calling—

["What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!" Has God called us to glory and virtue? has he made us "a peculiar people on purpose that we should shew forth both the praises and the virtues of him that has called us^r?" Let us then "walk as becometh saints," and "walk as becometh the Gospel of Christ." If we profess to have received such mercies at the Lord's hands, the world have a right to expect that we should surpass them as much in real excellence, as we do in the privileges of which we make our boast. "What do ye more than others?" is a question which they have a right to ask, and to which we ought to be able to return a satisfactory answer. Yea, our very lives should supersede the necessity of a verbal answer; we should be "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men." If indeed the world be not worthy of us, let them see their inferiority by our lives; and be constrained from what they behold in us to acknowledge, that "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour." If the difference between them and us be so immense as the Apostle represents it to be^s, let us labour to comply with his direction, and to shine before them with all the splendour of a holy people^t.]

4. To exert ourselves in bringing others to a participation of the benefits which we enjoy—

["Our light is not to be put under a bed, or under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that all around us may receive the benefit." The importance of this in relation to the blessings of civilization is generally acknowledged: and is it less

^m 1 Cor. iv. 7.

ⁿ 2 Cor. v. 5.

^o Ezek. xvi. 5, 6.

^p 1 John iii. 1.

^q Ps. ciii. 1—3.

^r 1 Pet. ii. 9. the Greek.

^s 2 Cor. vi. 14—18.

^t Phil. ii. 14, 15. This passage must be particularly marked.

important in reference to the blessings of salvation? Let every one of us then say with the Church of old, "Draw *me*, and we will come after thee;" that is, if God draw *me*, I will not come alone, but will draw all I can along with me. If men despise our efforts, and shew an utter disregard of the blessings which we hold out to them, let it only stir us up to augmented zeal, and plead with us the more powerfully to exert ourselves the more in their behalf. Let us expostulate with them, as the prophet does, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." And then, if they requite your labours only with hatred and persecution, determine through grace, that you "will gladly spend and be spent for them, though the more abundantly you love them, the less you be loved."]

MMCCCXXXIII.

THE ADVANTAGES ENJOYED UNDER THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION.

Heb. xi. 39, 40. *These all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*

WHEN we hear or read of the saints of old, we excuse our want of resemblance to them, from the idea that they were more highly favoured than we; and that it would be unreasonable to expect from us of these later days, such high attainments as they made by reason of their peculiar and more exalted dispensation. But this excuse is altogether founded on a mistake: for the disparity between their dispensation and ours is altogether in our favour, as we are expressly told in the passage before us; which will naturally lead me to shew,

I. What good things God vouchsafed to his people of old—

God has been gracious to his people in every age:

1. He gave them exceeding great and precious promises—

[The promise given to Adam in Paradise was gradually unfolded by successive revelations, till there was such a body of prophecy as exhibited the Saviour with the utmost possible precision. His person, work, and offices were all set forth so minutely; that, if the detached prophecies were collected and arranged, there would be found in the Old Testament as just a representation of him as in the Gospel itself. These formed a ground of hope to the Lord's people, who were thus instructed to look to their Messiah as "their Prophet, like unto Moses," to instruct them; their Priest, after the order of Melchizedec, to make atonement for them; and their King, who, sitting as on David's throne, should reign over them, and in them, for evermore.

2. He enabled them to live by faith upon these promises—

[Faith, in whomsoever it is found, is the gift of God: and it was richly bestowed on many, as appears from the chapter before us. We are even astonished at the strength with which it was exercised in many instances, and at the realizing views which it gave of invisible things to those in whom it was found. The instances recorded of it are still the brightest patterns for the imitation of the Christian Church^a — — —]

3. He testified his acceptance of their faith so exercised—

[This is noticed in the beginning of this chapter, and again repeated at the close of it^b. God testified his acceptance of their faith by invariably accomplishing those objects which he had encouraged them to expect, so that in no single instance was any one believer ever disappointed of his hope. However hopeless or even impossible the events might appear according to the judgment of man, every difficulty vanished, and every expectation was fulfilled, as soon as ever the faith of his people had been sufficiently tried, and the time for God's interposition was arrived. He further testified his acceptance of it by the witness of his Spirit in their souls. There can be no doubt but that they enjoyed in their souls a peace flowing from their affiance in God, and a sense of his love shed abroad in their hearts, together with an assurance of his approbation in the day of judgment. This appears from their "looking for a city which hath foundations, and a heavenly country," as "the recompence of their reward;" and from their refusing deliverance from present trials in full expectation of

^a Reference may here be made to two or three of those contained in the preceding context.

^b ver 2. with the text. See the Greek.

“a better resurrection” to life eternal. And what a testimony has he given in the record which is contained in this chapter; a record which will transmit their names with honour to the end of time!]

But, that we may form a just estimate of our blessings, I will proceed to shew,

II. What “better thing he has provided for us” under the Christian dispensation—

Certainly our privileges are far superior to theirs; for,

1. We have in possession that Saviour whom they only looked forward to in the promise—

[The first advent of Christ was held forth to them as an object of faith and hope, just as his second advent is to us. But the promise relating to that is now fulfilled. We have seen him accomplishing every prophecy, and performing in himself all that was shadowed forth in the infinitely diversified types of the ceremonial law: and we have, in this very circumstance, such a proof of his Messiahship, as no considerate and candid person can withstand. We have heard all his gracious instructions relative to the way of life; and have already seen his kingdom established in the world. We have seen “the stone that was cut out without hands, becoming a mountain, and filling the whole earth.”

What an unspeakable advantage is this! If Abraham rejoiced when he saw only by faith, and very indistinctly, the days of the Son of man, what reason have we to rejoice in having this adorable Saviour fully revealed in all his beauty, and excellency, and glory! Well does our Lord himself congratulate his believing people, saying, “Blessed are your eyes which see the things which ye see, and hear the things which ye hear^c.”]

2. We have in perfection those blessings which they enjoyed only in their commencement—

[They knew not what solid peace was: their sacrifices, however rich and abundant, could not impart this blessing: they were rather “remembrances of sin,” than real expiations; and “could make no man perfect as pertaining to the conscience.” “The law made nothing perfect; but the bringing in of a better hope did^d.” Their access to God was that of a servant, who keeps at a distance; ours is that rather of a child, who comes to the very bosom of his father^e. Their communications from him were as darkness, in comparison of

^c Luke xiv. 23, 24.

^d Heb. vii. 19.

^e Eph. iii. 12.

the light which we enjoy^f. The prophets themselves did not understand their own prophecies, as we do^g. Not even John the Baptist, who pointed out Jesus as “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world,” had such just conceptions of him as we have: in this respect “even the least believer that is to be found in all the kingdom of God, is greater than he.” All, not excepting even the Apostles themselves, till the day of Pentecost, had a veil upon their hearts, so that they could not behold the glory of God in the face of their Divine Master: “but we, with open and unveiled face, behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, and are changed by it into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord^h.”]

In the view of these glorious advantages, I would yet further DRAW YOUR ATTENTION to them in a way,

1. Of solemn inquiry—

[*What report does God, and what report does conscience, give respecting us?* Are we walking in the footsteps of the saints of old, even of those saints, who “by faith obtained a good report?” We are not to imagine that, whilst faith wrought so powerfully in them, it will have no visible influence on us. Be assured, that its operation is the same in all ages. Let me then ask, What effects it has wrought in *you*? Take the examples of Noah, of Abraham, and of Moses, *as set forth in the preceding part of the chapter*, and see what resemblance you bear to them — — — How inferior to them are we in our practice, notwithstanding the superiority of our advantages! — — — Have we not reason to blush and be ashamed at a review of our past lives, and at our misimprovement of the advantages which we enjoy? — — —]

2. Of affectionate admonition—

[*If ever you would “be made perfect,” you must both live by faith, and “die in the faith.”* To be “walking by sight, when you should walk by faith only,” will surely bring you to a far different end from that which you desire and expect. Oh! “listen not to flesh and blood;” but obey unfeignedly, and without reserve, the commandments of your God. Set before you the invisible God, who marks all your ways, and tries your very reins and heart. Set before you also the invisible realities of the eternal world, the glories of heaven and the miseries of hell; and consider which of them is the portion prepared for you. What a lamentable thing will it

^f 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10. 1 John ii. 8.

^g 1 Pet. i. 12.

^h 2 Cor. iii. 18.

be in the day of judgment to see such an one as Rahab, an accursed Canaanite and a harlot, admitted into the kingdom of heaven, and you yourselves cast out! I pray you avail yourselves of the advantages which you enjoy; and let them not issue in your heavier condemnation. The promise of Christ's coming to *judge* the world will as surely be fulfilled, as that of his coming to *save* the world has been. And if you look forward to that event, and to the everlasting separation of the righteous from the wicked, O think "what manner of persons ye ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness;" and "be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." — — —]

MMCCCXXXIV.

CHRIST'S PERSEVERING DILIGENCE.

Heb. xii. 1, 2. *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

WHEN we read the history of the Jews as recorded in the sacred volume, we in general feel no other interest in the events related concerning them, than we do in those which are handed down to us by the historians of Greece and Rome. But, allowing for some local and circumstantial differences, the same things are transacted amongst ourselves; and the records which we read, may serve as a glass wherein to see all that is now passing in the world. The saints of old, even from righteous Abel to the end of the prophetic age, were called to a life of suffering, and by their sufferings were made perfect. Thus also "must we go through much tribulation in our way to the heavenly kingdom;" and fill up the measure of sufferings which is allotted us in this vale of tears.

The Apostle having given us a long catalogue of worthies, who had approved themselves faithful unto

death, and had thereby "obtained a good report," exhorts us to follow their example, and more especially the example of our blessed Lord himself.

In this passage are contained,

I. An exhortation to run our race—

All of us are called to "run our race with patience"—

[There is a course marked out for us by God himself: nor can any one err from it, who duly attends to the directions given him in the Holy Scriptures. In this course we are to run. We are not left at liberty to choose a path for ourselves: the race is "set before us," and to that we must strictly adhere. But we cannot hold on in it without much and continual exertion. Many are the difficulties that obstruct our way: sometimes our path is steep and slippery; and sometimes it is rough and thorny. Often are we wearied in it and ready to faint, before our course is half finished. And not unfrequently they who ought most to aid and encourage us, exert themselves to the utmost to impede our progress. But our duty is to run our race "with patience;" to hold on till we arrive at the goal, in spite of all our external trials, or inward weakness; and "by patient continuance in well-doing to seek for glory and honour and immortality." To run well for a season will avail us nothing: we must "endure unto the end, if ever we would be saved."]

To this we should be stimulated by the consideration of the many witnesses that surround us—

[The saints who have gone before us, having finished their course with joy, are represented as being *spectators of our conflicts*, and *witnesses to us that our persevering efforts shall be crowned with success*. In both of these views, the consideration of *them* is calculated to refresh our spirits, and to quicken our languishing exertions. Conceive "a cloud," or multitude of departed saints, and more especially of those who ran together with us; conceive them looking upon us with eager solicitude, rejoicing when they behold us rapidly advancing, and ready to weep over us, if at any time they see us on the decline; conceive them crying out to us, Press forward; remember me; I once endured the same trials; I, like you, was ready to faint; but, through grace, I held on: and at last I obtained the prize: hold on then a little longer, and the crown of righteousness is yours; "be not weary in well-doing; for in due season you shall reap, if you faint not:" I say, let us dwell on this thought; and surely, if ever men running in a race were encouraged by the acclamations of their

friends, much more shall we by such animating considerations as these.]

Together with this earnest exhortation, the Apostle gives us,

II. Directions to ensure success—

1. We must put away whatever obstructs our progress—

[They who are about to run a race need not be reminded of the necessity there is to cast off all unnecessary weight, or any long garment which may impede their motion. But in running our spiritual race we are apt to be forgetful of this obvious and necessary caution. Many things there are which operate as a burthen to weigh down our spirits; and to exhaust our strength. How often do the cares or pleasures of the world divide our attention, enfeeble our efforts, and prevent our advancement in the divine life! There is in every one some “sin that more easily besets him,” and which, like a flowing robe^a, diminishes his activity in the service of his God. What sin this is we should be careful to inquire. It will in general be found to be some inward lust that is constitutionally wrought into our frame, or some evil, incident to our situation, our company, or our employment. Whatever it be, whether pride, or passion, whether covetousness or uncleanness, whether sloth or intemperance, whether unbelief or impenitence, whether self-righteousness or self-dependence, we must “put it away.” Whatever tends to divert us from the path of duty, or to embarrass us in it, must be sacrificed, if we would “so run as to obtain the prize.”]

2. We must direct our eyes to Jesus Christ—

[Jesus is here proposed to our view both *as our successful pattern*, and *as our almighty friend*. Never had any other person such a difficult course to run: nor could any other ever have persevered in it. The cross he bare was heavier than we can possibly conceive: nor was the ignominy of it less than the pain: but “he endured the cross and despised the shame:” he looked to “the joy that was set before him,” the joy of glorifying his heavenly Father, the joy of delivering a ruined world, the joy of being for ever the acknowledged author of their salvation: and in the prospect of having all this consummated, he disregarded all his trials and difficulties, he even “longed to be baptized with his bloody baptism,” and continued with unabated ardour till he could say, “It is finished;” and till, in consequence of his victorious career, he was exalted to the “right hand of the throne of God.”]

^a Εὐπερίστατον ἄμαρτίαν.

How should we be encouraged by the sight of this *our successful pattern*! for, what are our trials in comparison of his? How richly too are his exertions recompensed, even as ours also shall in due time be, in the full possession of the prize that was set before him!

But the Apostle directs us to look unto Jesus also as *our almighty friend*. It is he who marked out for us our course, who called us forth to run in it, who holds out to our view the prize, who sits as umpire to award the prize to every one that wins it, and who will bestow it on us with his own hand. He is moreover "the author and the finisher of our faith;" from him proceeds that faith whereby we are stimulated to engage in the race, and that whereby we are enabled to persevere in it to the end. Let us then look at him, and see how sufficient he is to renew our strength, and how interested he is in crowning our efforts with success.

There is a peculiarity in this direction which we must by no means pass over. The Apostle tells us not merely to *look unto* Jesus, but, in so doing, to *look off^b* from every thing else. We are apt to look at our own weakness, at the length and difficulties of our way, at the strength and number of those who are endeavouring to cast us down, or at any thing that tends to discourage us: but we should look off from all these things, and keep our eyes steadily fixed on Jesus as our pattern, and our friend: and then our difficulties will appear as nothing; and we shall proceed cheerfully in an assured expectation of the prize^c.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who have never yet begun to run—

[Were it optional with you whether you would have any interest in this race or not, we might leave you to your choice: but you are of necessity entered upon the lists, and must have all the shame and misery of failure, if you run not so as to obtain the prize. The loss of heaven is not the sole consequence of your sloth: for, if you be not judged worthy of the felicity of heaven, you will receive the doom of the wicked and slothful servant in the torments of hell. Consider then how much time you have lost, how little may yet remain, and what an arduous race you have to run; and begin immediately, while yet the prize is in your view, and Jesus is ready to assist your feeble efforts.]

2. To those who are halting, or turning aside out of the course—

[Many "run well for a season, and yet, after all, are hindered^d" from pressing forward to the goal. Inquire, my

^b Ἀπορῶντες.

^c 1 Cor. ix. 26.

^d Gal. v. 7.

brethren, whence it is that such a lamentable change has taken place in you? What is there that will compensate for the loss of the heavenly prize? It were better far to part with every weight, and every incumbrance, whether friends, or interests, or pleasures of whatever kind, or even with life itself, than to be diverted from your course, or to be retarded in it. Be assured that, as "he who puts his hand to the plough, and looks back, is not fit for the kingdom of heaven," so neither can he be, who halts in his Christian race. May God enable you to resume your labours! and know for your encouragement, that, if persisted in, "they shall not be in vain in the Lord^e."]

3. To those who are resolutely hastening toward the goal—

[Doubtless you are sometimes ready to faint: but look at the cloud of witnesses that are gone before you: look at Jesus in particular, that bright example of all righteousness, and that gracious helper of all his followers. Look too at the prize, the joy that is set before you; and "have respect unto the recompence of reward:" how richly will *that* repay you for your persevering exertions! Methinks you are now come within a short distance of the goal, and thousands of God's dear children, though invisible to you, are looking on, and standing ready to congratulate your success. Press on then a little longer, "forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto that which is before^f:" so shall you "finish your course with joy," and "receive the crown of righteousness from the hands of Jesus, your righteous Judge^g."]

^e 1 Cor. xv. 58.

^f Phil. iii. 13, 14.

^g 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

MMCCCXXXV.

CHRIST'S PATIENCE UNDER SUFFERINGS.

Heb. xii. 3. *Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*

THINGS are good or evil in this life chiefly by comparison: the happiest of men is unhappy in comparison of Adam in Paradise; and the most miserable of men is happy in comparison of those who are in hell. This reflection will be of great service to us in estimating our own state. It is not indeed expedient that we should compare ourselves with those

who appear in a more prosperous condition than ourselves (unless for the purposes of humiliation and self-abasement), lest we should be led to envy them, and to repine at our own lot : but it will be highly advantageous to us frequently to view the wants and sufferings of others, in order to extirpate every murmuring thought, and to stimulate our own souls to gratitude and thanksgiving. A sight of the Lord Jesus in particular cannot fail to produce in us the best effects ; since all that we are called to endure for his sake, is as nothing in comparison of what he patiently and willingly endured for us—

In the text we have this very direction given us, and for this express purpose. The Apostle, in what he wrote for the comfort of the afflicted Hebrews, reminds us,

I. That the soul is apt to faint under heavy trials—

The people of God are taught to expect trials from an ungodly world ; and to make their sufferings an occasion of joy and glorying. But,

Even the most eminent saints have fainted under their trials—

[In the Scriptures we have the weaknesses of God's people as faithfully recorded as their virtues. And there is scarcely a saint who has not on some occasions shewn himself weak as other men. Jacob, in despondency, cried, " All these things are against me^a." Moses, by his intemperate and hasty expressions, provoked God to exclude him from the earthly Canaan^b. Job cursed the day of his birth, and accused even God himself of cruelty and oppression^c. David said it was in vain to serve God ; and called all who had ever testified to the contrary, by the name of liars^d. Elijah, through the dread of Jezebel, begged of God to put an end to his life^e. Jeremiah lamented that he had ever been born ; and complained that God himself was to him " as a liar, and as waters that fail^f." All of these were very distinguished characters, and yet, in circumstances of peculiar trial, lost that composure of mind which it was their duty, and their privilege, to possess.]

^a Gen. xlii. 36.

^b Numb. xx. 10—12.

^c Job iii. 3. and x. 3. and xvi. 12—14.

^d Ps. lxxiii. 13, 14. and lxxvii. 4, 7—9. and cxvi. 10, 11.

^e 1 Kings xix. 4.

^f Jer. xv. 10, 18.

And who amongst us has not on many occasions betrayed the same weakness?

[We have borne up with fortitude perhaps against some trials, which have been light and transient; but how have we sustained those which were heavy, complicated, and of long continuance? When our troubles have arisen from those who were our avowed enemies, we have endured them manfully: but when they have come from a quarter that we did not expect, or from a quarter from whence we had reason to expect nothing but support and consolation, how have we endured them *then*? If some near relative, or a friend that was as our own soul, have been the immediate cause of our affliction, and our enemies have been those of our own household, have we not given way to complaint and murmuring? Yea, have not our very spirits failed by reason of vexation, insomuch that we could find scarce any comfort in life. If we have not been turned from the faith, like those who were afraid to confess Christ^g, have we not been diverted from the path of duty, and been led to manifest a vindictive spirit instead of overcoming evil with good? Let this then suffice to shew us how weak we are, and how much we need the supports and consolations of the Gospel.]

But in the text the Apostle informs us,

II. That a view of Christ's patience under his sufferings will afford us most effectual relief—

Many are the consolations which the Gospel administers, by pointing out to us the author and the intent of our trials, together with the benefits resulting from them. But there is no source of comfort so great as that which the consideration of Christ's sufferings opens to us.

The contradiction of sinners which Christ endured was wonderful indeed—

[Consider *the unreasonableness* with which he was opposed, when, notwithstanding the myriads of miracles that he wrought, his enemies were continually demanding more signs, and pretending a want of evidence as the ground of their unbelief. Consider *the obstinacy* with which he was rejected, when his victory over the devils was ascribed to a confederacy with them; and Lazarus himself was made an object of murderous resentment, because his restoration from the grave was the means of converting some who were more open to conviction.

Consider *the malice* with which he was persecuted. Incessantly did his enemies labour to ensnare him, and seek to take away his life. And, when they had a prospect of effecting their purpose, there was no method, however infamous, which they did not use to accomplish their wishes. With what inveteracy did they suborn false witnesses; and, on the failure of that device, compel the judge by clamours and menaces, to give sentence against him! Consider *the cruelty* with which he was put to death. They might, one would have thought, have been satisfied with seeing his back torn, and even ploughed up, with scourges: but their cruelty was insatiable; for, even when he was nailed to the accursed tree, they ceased not to mock and insult him, and to add by their indignities a tenfold poignancy to all his anguish.

Yet, notwithstanding the contradiction of sinners against him was so great and unparalleled, he endured it all with patience, never fainting, never wearied, till he expired under the accumulated load.]

A due consideration of this will keep us from fainting under our sorrows—

[*What are our sorrows in comparison of his?* The utmost we have met with is a little contempt and ridicule, or perhaps the loss of some worldly interests or prospects. “We have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin^h,” and any thing short of that should be deemed unworthy of our notice. *How slight are the aggravations of our sufferings in comparison of his!* If we do not deserve such treatment from man, have we not merited infinitely worse from God? But *he* was altogether spotless; nor could either men or devils lay any thing to *his* charge. Perhaps we have endeavoured to do some good to those who now hate and revile us: but *he* came from heaven for the salvation of them that hated him; yea, and subjected himself to the power of his enemies, on purpose that he might effect their reconciliation with God. If then he patiently endured such things for *us*, should we faint when called to endure some light afflictions for *him*? Surely we should rather rejoice that an opportunity is afforded us of testifying our love to him, and of approving ourselves faithful to his interests.]

We may IMPROVE this subject,

1. For our humiliation—

[How should we be ashamed of our readiness to shrink from the cross, and to complain when it is laid upon us! What if we should be called to lay down our lives for Christ, as

thousands have been before us? How should we endure *that* trial? “If we have run with the footmen and they wearied us, how shall we contend with horses? if we be wearied in a land of peace, how shall we do in the swelling of Jordanⁱ?” Let us remember, that “he who hateth not his own life, (when it stands in competition with his duty) cannot be Christ’s disciple.” Let us then never fear the face of man^k; but whenever we are tempted to betray the cause of Christ, let us reflect on the example he has set us, and “arm ourselves likewise with the same mind^l.”]

2. For our encouragement—

[Some variation in our frames we must expect: but we must never suffer a desponding thought to lodge within us. Be it so; our sufferings are very great: then we are the more conformed to the example of our blessed Lord. And shall not this thought console us? And if we walk in his steps shall we not soon be with him where he is? Let us then be content to “fill up the measure of his sufferings,” and to follow him in his appointed way. Thus shall we, like him, “be made perfect through sufferings; and, having suffered with him for a little while, “be also glorified with him” to all eternity^m.]

ⁱ Jer. xii. 5.

^k Isai. li. 7, 8, 12, 13.

^l 1 Pet. iv. 1.

^m Rom. viii. 17.

MMCCCXXXVI.

AFFLICTIONS THE FRUIT OF GOD’S LOVE.

Heb. xii. 4—13. *Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which*

hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

PERSECUTION for righteousness' sake is what every child of God must expect: and when faith is in lively exercise, it will be sustained without murmuring. This is amply shewn in the preceding chapter^a. But when faith languishes, the trials which believers are called to endure will appear almost insupportable. Such was the state of many of the Hebrews to whom the Apostle wrote: they were in danger of becoming weary and faint in their minds through the greatness and long continuance of their sufferings. On this account, St. Paul, having shewn them the power of a living faith to support them, brings before them a variety of considerations,

I. For their consolation and support—

The patience of Christ under his sufferings is beyond all comparison the strongest incentive to resignation under ours; since ours fall so infinitely short of his. This the Apostle first propounds for their consideration; and then goes on, in the words which we have just read, to offer other suggestions, which also are of great weight for the reconciling of the mind to trials, of whatever kind they be. From them we also, when bowed down with affliction, may learn to support them manfully: for,

1. They are far less than we have pledged ourselves willingly to endure—

[The very terms on which we come to Christ are, that we shall be ready to die for him at any time, and in any way, that he shall see fit. We are plainly warned by our Lord himself, that, if we will not lay down our life for him, we cannot be his disciples. “If we love our lives, we shall lose them: but, if we lose them for his sake, then shall we find them to life eternal.” But, what is the loss of temporal good when compared with that of life? Be it granted that, like the Hebrews, we have suffered much^b: yet our persecutors have stopped far short of what they might have inflicted; and may, for ought

^a Heb. xi. 35—38.

^b Heb. x. 32—34.

we know, be yet permitted to inflict: "We have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." Instead therefore of complaining of the heaviness of our trials, we have reason rather to be thankful for the lightness of them: and, if we faint when they are so light, how shall we support them when they come upon us with unrestrained force? "If we have run with footmen and they wearied us, how shall we contend with horses?" In our "strivings then against sin" and Satan, let us prepare for yet greater extremities: and, when we are prepared for the worst that can come upon us, then will all which stops short of that appear light and easy to be borne.]

2. They are all the fruits of paternal love—

[God had exhorted his people under the Old Testament dispensation to regard their trials in this view, as sent by a loving Father to his children; and to receive them with truly filial gratitude, "neither despising them," as though they came only by chance, "nor fainting under them," as though they had been sent in anger^c. And the Apostle fixes our attention particularly on the tender and affectionate terms under which our God addresses us; "*My son*, despise not." And we should not overlook such endearing expressions, which, if duly attended to, would reconcile us even to the most afflictive dispensations. The truth is, that *man* is only an instrument in God's hands: and that the very afflictions which men lay upon us for our *excess* of piety, God lays upon us for our *defects*, or for the further advancement of his work within us. St. Paul's thorn in the flesh was ordained of God to prevent his being too much elated by the revelations which had been vouchsafed unto him^e. Our state in this world is a state of discipline: we are yet children, and need correction on account of our manifold errors and faults: and it is by correction that we are gradually brought to the exercise of true wisdom. This is found universally amongst men; insomuch that there is no wise father who does not occasionally correct his child. A man, who sees children that are unconnected with him acting amiss, takes no notice of them, but leaves to others the painful office of correcting them: but his own children he corrects, because of his peculiar interest in them, and his love towards them. Would we then that God should disregard us as bastards, that have no real relation to him? Would we not much rather be dealt with by him as his beloved children, in whose welfare he takes the deepest interest? Whatever then be our affliction, corporeal or mental, personal or domestic; or with whatever view it may be inflicted on us by others, let us view the hand of a Father in it,

^c Jer. xii. 5.

^d Prov. iii. 11, 12.

^e 2 Cor. xii. 7.

and say, with Eli, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good^f." Let us "hear the rod, and him who hath appointed it^g;" and endeavour to make a just improvement of it for the good of our souls.]

3. If we have submitted patiently to the rebukes of our earthly parents, much more should we to those of our heavenly Father—

[Earthly parents do not always correct so justly or so temperately as they ought; their rebukes being sometimes little else than an ebullition of their own evil tempers: yet we have submitted to their corrections without presuming to arraign the wisdom, the justice, or the love that inflicted the chastisement upon us. This is a part of that honour which children were by God's law enjoined to pay those who were the fathers of *their flesh*; and which, if they obstinately refused to pay, they were, by God's own appointment, to be stoned to death^h. But this submission is due in an infinitely higher degree to Him who is the Father of *our spirits*: and, if we refuse it to him, a far worse death assuredly awaits us in the world to come; for he never inflicts any evil upon us but for our greater good, even that we may become in a greater degree "partakers of his holiness." On the other hand, to obedient children there was a peculiar promise of a long and happy life; a promise doubtless fulfilled to multitudes in former times, and not unfrequently accomplished now. But to those who meekly submit to the Divine chastisements, it shall be fulfilled in the Canaan that is above, even in the regions of blessedness and glory for evermore. Shall we then refuse to the corrections of our heavenly Father that submission which we paid to our earthly parents? "Shall we not much rather be in subjection to him, and *live*?" Surely this is our truest wisdom, and our highest privilege.]

4. Our sufferings, how grievous soever they may appear at the time, are all sent for our eternal good—

[Whilst we have the feelings of humanity, chastening, of whatever kind it be, cannot but be grievous to us at the time: but after it has produced its proper effects, "it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby." At first, tribulation works *impatience*: but, when the soul has been well disciplined by a continuance or recurrence of it, a better temper is produced; and, through the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit upon the soul, a

^f 1 Sam. iii. 18.

^g Mic. vi. 9.

^h Deut. xxi. 18—21.

different process is produced; and “tribulation worketh *patience*, and patience experience, and experience hope; even a hope that maketh not ashamedⁱ.” Now shall we complain of dispensations which are sent for such an end? Shall the vine complain of the pruning knife, which cuts only with a view to increase its fruitfulness? Shall the vessel complain of the furnace into which it is put in order to effect its meetness for the Master’s use? Let us then look to *the end*; and we shall never repine at the means which Infinite Wisdom has ordained for the attainment of it. If we be “in heaviness through manifold temptations, let us not forget that there is a fit occasion for them; and that the trial of our faith, which is infinitely more precious than that which purifies the gold, will be found to the praise and honour and glory of our God, and to our own also, at the appearing of Jesus Christ^k.” If we be “made partakers of his holiness,” we shall never complain of the means which were used to bring us to the attainment of it.]

5. Walk so as to encourage others by your example—

[The influence of example is far greater than we are ready to imagine. Peter, in order to avoid the displeasure of the Judaizing Christians, had recourse to dissimulation. (Here I may observe that if an Apostle swerved so grievously from the path of duty, through his carnal reasonings, who has not reason to take heed lest he also fall?) And what effect had this on others? “The whole Church dissembled with him; insomuch that even Barnabas himself was carried away with their dissimulation^l.” On the other hand, see the effect of good example in the Apostle Paul. He was imprisoned for the truth’s sake, and retained his fidelity undaunted, and undiminished; insomuch that “his bonds for Christ’s sake became a matter of notoriety through Cæsar’s palace, and in all other places. And what was the effect of this? We are told, that “many of the brethren in the Lord *waxing confident by his bonds*,” and by what they heard of his fortitude in supporting them, “were much more bold to speak the word without fear,” so that “the Gospel was furthered” by the very means which its enemies used to obstruct its progress^m. Similar effects will, in a greater or less degree, follow from our conduct under our afflictions. There are in every place many who may be considered as “lame,” who will be stumbled and weakened, and discouraged, if they see us faint; whilst, on the other hand, they will be encouraged and emboldened to go

ⁱ Rom. v. 3—5.

^k 1 Pet. i. 6, 7.

^l Gal. ii. 13, 14.

^m Phil. i. 12—14.

forward, if they behold us adhering resolutely to the path of duty, and supporting manfully the trials which are come upon us. Let us then think of the probable effect of our conduct upon those around us: let us think how much good or evil we may do, according as we approve ourselves to God, or not, in the discharge of our duty. There is a high line which we should pursue, even that which the Apostle prayed for in behalf of the Colossians, to be "strengthened with all might, according to God's glorious power—unto all patience, and long-suffering, with joyfulness—giving thanks unto the Father who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in lightⁿ." And think not that such an aim as this would betray any arrogance in you: for Timothy was but a youth, and yet was directed to be an example, not to the world only, but to believers also, in every thing that was good^o: and it is the duty of every one, whether a minister or not, "so to let his light shine before men, that all who behold it may be led to glorify their Father which is in heaven^p." In a word, let us all endeavour so to walk, that we may say with the Apostle Paul, "Whatsoever ye have heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you^q."

The Apostle having instructed the Hebrews in the true nature and end of their sufferings, suggests some further considerations,

II. For their direction and guidance—

These also we shall consider as addressed to us; and in correspondence with them we would say to all sufferers of the present day,

1. Yield not to dejection—

[Troubles, whether felt or feared, are apt to depress the spirits, and to enervate the whole man. This we see depicted in strong colours in the Prophet Ezekiel. "Sigh," says God to him, "Sigh, thou son of man, with the breaking of thy loins, and with bitterness sigh before their eyes. And it shall be, when they say unto thee, Wherefore sighest thou? that thou shalt answer, For the tidings: because it cometh: and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak as water^r." But it should not be thus with us, whatever be the trials with which we have been visited, or with which we may be menaced: for they all are ordered by a wise and gracious God, who controuls and limits all according to his own sovereign will, and without whose permission not a hair of our head can be

ⁿ Col. i. 11, 12.

^o 1 Tim. iv. 12.

^p Matt. v. 16.

^q Col. iv. 9.

^r Ezek. xxi. 7.

touched. Our enemies, unconscious of their dependence on him, plot and threaten our destruction. But see what the Psalmist says concerning them: "The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth: but the Lord shall laugh at him^s," as a poor, impotent, and malignant worm, that exists only through his forbearance and tender mercy. Now, I ask, shall *God laugh* at him, and *we cry*? Shall we not rather set the poor impotent worm at defiance? But see what the Psalmist further adds: "The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation." And what is the issue of all this? "Their sword shall enter into *their own* heart, and their *bows* shall be *broken*." "Say ye not then, A confederacy, like those who are crying out, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid: but sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let *him* be your fear, and let *him* be your dread: and he shall be to you for a sanctuary^u." And when others would alarm you with the supposed power of your persecutors, let your answer be, "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven^x." The greatest of all your adversaries, even Satan himself, could not so much as enter into the swine without permission: how then shall he, or any of his confederates, hurt a child of God without permission^y? You may laugh them all to scorn, and shake your head at them^z: for, with God on your side, there are a million times "more for you than against you." Only "be strong in the Lord^a," and you will be more than conqueror over all.]

2. Swerve not from the path of duty—

[Fear, and unbelief, and impatience "will make our ways crooked^b:" and the contrivances to which under their influence we shall have recourse for the purpose of avoiding difficulties, will augment our difficulties an hundred-fold. The way to "make straight paths for our feet," is simply to fulfil the will of God, and leave events to him. If Daniel and the Hebrew Youths had set themselves to consider how they might avoid the trials with which they were threatened, they might have attained their end, it is true; but they would have involved their souls in the deepest guilt. They followed the straight-forward path: not moving to the right hand nor to the left, to avoid the fiery furnace, or a den of lions. This was right — — — And this is the very direction given to us also by God himself: "Ponder the path of thy feet; and let all thy ways

^s Ps. xxxvii. 12, 13.

^t Ps. xxxvii. 14, 15.

^u Isaï. viii. 12—14.

^x Ps. xi. 1—4.

^y 1 Pet. iii. 13.

^z Isaï. xxxvii. 22.

^a Eph. vi. 10.

^b Isaï. lix. 8.

be established : Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left ; remove thy feet from evil^c." Adopt this then as the principle from which no consideration under heaven shall induce you to depart ; " I must obey my God : " and, if the whole world combine to divert you from it, let your reply be, " Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." This will deliver you from endless perplexity. This will make your every path both clear and straight. " If your eye be evil," and the film of carnal hopes or fears be upon it, " your whole body will be full of darkness : " but " if your eye be single," and you have no purpose but to serve and honour God, " your whole body will be full of light^d," and your steps be directed in a way wherein you shall neither err, nor stumble.]

^c Prov. iv. 26, 27.

^d Matt. vi. 22, 23.

MMCCCXXXVII.

THE NECESSITY OF HOLINESS.

Heb. xii. 14. *Follow . . . holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord,*

THE Gospel, while it brings us into a state of reconciliation with God, enjoins us to maintain peace with man. This is rendered difficult, not only by the evil dispositions that are exercised on account of daily occurrences, but more especially by the enmity which subsists in the hearts of the generality with respect to religion ; in reference to which our Lord himself said, " I come not to send peace on earth, but a sword." Much however may be done by means of patience, meekness, and forbearance ; and it is our duty to sacrifice any thing, except a good conscience, for the sake of peace. But our duty to God is paramount to every other consideration : therefore the Apostle, exhorting the Hebrews to " follow *peace* with all men," adds immediately, " and *holiness*, without which no man shall see the Lord : " the import of which is, that we may fail in obtaining *peace*, however earnestly we may seek it ; but *holiness* we may, and must, attain at the peril of our souls ; for without it no man shall see the Lord.

We shall,

I. Ascertain the nature of holiness—

Holiness is a conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God—

But, to enter more fully into the subject, it implies,

1. That we love the whole will of God—

[There is not any thing that more truly characterizes a Christian than this: it draws a line of distinction between him and all other persons upon earth. The self-righteous Pharisee, and the most refined hypocrite, have secret objections against the law of God; they think its precepts too strict, and its sanctions too severe. They would be glad if it left them somewhat greater latitude. They would be content that it should forbid gross outward sins, and insist on the performance of outward duties: but that it should call for continual self-denial, that it should require brokenness of heart and contrition for the most secret offences, and demand the utmost exertion of all our faculties in the service of our God, *this* appears too much; they would wish for an easier way to heaven.

But a person that possesses the smallest measure of true holiness, is the very reverse of this. He lothes himself for not complying more perfectly with the demands of the law; but he never condemns the law as too strict; he would not have it require one jot or tittle less than it does. He even admires and loves it for its purity; he says with David, "The commandment of the Lord is pure, therefore thy servant loveth it." He acknowledges it to be not only "holy, and just, but good" also, and calculated to make every one happy that obeys it. And though he cannot obey it perfectly, he can truly say, "I delight in the law of God after my inward man:" yea, the language of his heart is, "O that my ways were made so direct, that I might keep thy statutes."]

2. That we live in no allowed deviation from it—

[We mean not to say, that a Christian experiences no deviations from the law of God; (for, alas! he is conscious of many) but he does not *allow* them. Others will obey the will of God as far as will consist with their interests and reputation; or with the exception of some bosom sin; but there will always be found, in insincere persons, some secret lust for which they plead, and in reference to which they say, "Pardon thy servant in this thing."

But true holiness admits of no reserves, no limitations, no exceptions: and he who possesses it will stop short of nothing that God has commanded. He may do what is wrong, either

through ignorance or temptation; but he will not persist in it: he will endeavour to mortify the whole body of sin. He will no more *allow himself* in secret sins, whether of omission or of commission, than he will commit the greatest enormities. Like David he says, "I esteem thy commandments concerning all things to be right; therefore I hate every false way;" that is, I love the ways of duty, so that I would walk in them even if there were no reward; and I hate the ways of sin, so that I would shun them, though I were sure never to incur punishment.]

3. That we actually grow in a conformity to it—

[Sanctification is a progressive work. A child of God arrives not at full stature but by degrees: he is constantly growing in grace: the vernal bloom gradually advances to the autumnal fruit. There may indeed be seasons wherein he may appear to decline, or may really suffer a declension: but if he have the grace of God in his heart, he will revive, and return to God with more fervour and steadfastness. Nor will he ever think he has already attained, or is already perfect; but "forgetting the things that are behind, he will reach forward unto that which is before."

This is in no respect the case with others. They are satisfied with their present state: they are not conscious of their defects; and therefore they feel no longings for higher attainments. They are like a painted sun upon the canvass, while the true Christian "grows up into Christ in all things as his living head," and, like the sun in the firmament, "shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."]

Having in this description of holiness, marked the lowest degree of it that exists in a true Christian, we proceed to,

II. Shew the grounds, on which it is necessary in order to salvation—

If we were not able to assign any reason for God's determination, it would be quite sufficient for us to know, that he has issued his decree. It is not for us to dispute, but to submit, saying,

"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

But there is one obvious ground on which the necessity of holiness is indisputable, namely, that *in the very nature of things it is impossible without it to enjoy the Divine presence—*

[If heaven were a place suited to a carnal mind, and afforded the gratifications which unregenerate men affect,

then indeed unholy men might find such happiness there, as in their state they are capable of receiving. But heaven is a *holy* place; the habitation of a *holy* God: it is filled with myriads of *holy* men and angels, who are exercising themselves incessantly in the *holy* employments of praise and adoration. What then would there be in that place suited to the taste of an *unholy* man? Could those whose spirits were defiled with sin, and who had never been purged from its guilt by the atoning blood of Christ, find pleasure in the presence of God, who, being omniscient, could not but discern their state, and, being *holy*, could not but regard them with abhorrence? Would not a consciousness of his power terrify them, and a recollection that he had once cast innumerable angels out of heaven, appal them? Could they delight in the society of the glorified saints whom they so little resemble, or find communion with them in exercises, which were here their burthen and aversion? We are fully assured, that "as the tree falleth, so it lieth;" that "he who is unjust, will be unjust still, and he who is filthy, will be filthy still." If it has not been the one desire of our hearts to honour and enjoy God; if secret intercourse with him in our chambers, and social fellowship with him in the public assembly, have been a mere task, and not the delight of our souls, how can we suppose that we should instantly find a delight in these things in heaven? How could we endure to spend an eternity there in employments, for which we had no taste? We are told, that there is a "meetness for the inheritance of the saints^a:" and that we must have that meetness before we could enjoy the Divine presence, even if we were admitted into it. Christ must be precious to us now, if we would find him so in the eternal world: and we must account it our supreme felicity to enjoy him now, if we would hereafter join the chorus of saints and angels, in ascribing "Salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever." In short, holiness, real holiness of heart, is as necessary to the enjoyment of the Divine presence, as a taste for music, or literature, is for the company and employments of musical or literary men. As we soon grow weary of things which we do not affect, and prefer any other employment that is more suited to our inclination and capacity, so most assuredly must it be even in heaven, if our natures be not changed: we shall remain for ever destitute of those qualities which constitute our meetness for the heavenly inheritance, and consequently be for ever incapable of participating the joys of heaven.

This may at least be sufficient to *illustrate* the declaration in the text; perhaps we may add also, to *vindicate* it. Not that any declaration of God is to be judged of by the reasons

^a Col. i. 12.

which fallible men may assign in vindication of it: his word is the same, whether we believe it or not; nor shall one jot or tittle of it ever fail.]

This subject cannot but suggest to our minds the following REFLECTIONS:

1. How few are there that will eventually be saved!

[Take the foregoing explanation of holiness, and compare it with the state of all around us; how awful the contrast! — — — But God is true; and his word respecting the unholy shall surely stand — — — Let us “seek then, yea, strive to enter in at the strait gate, and to walk in the narrow path” — — — Let us “follow” holiness with all our might — — — Whatever we may think, it is in that way alone that we can behold the face of God in peace.]

2. How needful is it that we should seek holiness in a right way!

[The generality are extremely ignorant respecting the manner in which holiness is to be obtained: they have an idea that they must acquire it by some exertions of their own: whereas they should seek it from Christ, through the operation of his Spirit in their hearts. They should first seek to be united to him by faith, as scions to the stock of a tree, or as a wife to her husband^b: then, by virtue derived from him, they will be made fruitful in good works, and be “changed into his image in righteousness, and true holiness.”]

^b These are the very means prescribed by our Lord, John xv. 4, 5. and by St. Paul, Rom. vii. 4.

MMCCCXXXVIII.

THE DANGER OF DESPISING OR DISHONOURING THE GOSPEL.

Heb. xii. 15—17. *Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.*

UNSEARCHABLE are the riches of the Gospel, and freely imparted to all who seek them by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet they quite mistake the

nature of the Gospel, who imagine it to be inconsistent with solemn warnings. It offers every thing freely ; but it does not dispense with the exertion of human efforts : it promises every thing fully ; but not in such a way as to supersede the need of care and watchfulness on our part. In fact, it abounds with warnings and exhortations, to which we must take the utmost heed ; and by attending to which we are to secure the blessings which it holds out to us. Nothing can be conceived more consolatory than all the foregoing declarations, that sufferings of whatever kind, and especially those inflicted on us for righteousness' sake, are permitted by our heavenly Father for our good, and shall be overruled by him for the advancement of our best interests. At the same time we are warned, that "without holiness, radical and universal holiness, no man shall see the Lord : " and we are cautioned to "look diligently," lest, by coming short of the requirements of the Gospel, we fail to attain a possession of its blessings.

The caution here given us is two-fold :

I. Not to come short of the Gospel in embracing it—

By "the grace of God" I understand "the Gospel of the grace of God," or that "grace of God which bringeth salvation." And by "falling of the grace of God," I understand, a falling short of it : the first part of our text being exactly parallel with that expression in the fourth chapter of this epistle, "Let us fear lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to *come short* of it^a." Now we may come short of the Gospel,

1. By not submitting to its humiliating doctrines—

[The Gospel views all men as in a lost and perishing condition. Its provisions are made for all mankind without exception. It knows nothing of persons so good as not to need salvation, or of persons so bad as to be beyond the reach of the salvation which it provides. It requires all to view themselves as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked ; and counsels them to come to the Lord Jesus Christ for eye-salve that they may see ; for gold that they may be enriched ;

^a Heb. iv. 1. ὑστερημένοι.

and for garments that they may be clothed^b." It suffers none to bring any price in their hands, but requires them to receive every thing "without money and without price^c." Nor does it merely require this of men at their first conversion: it prescribes the same humiliating system to the latest hour of our lives: whatever our attainments be, we must renounce them all in point of dependence, and place our whole dependence on the Lord "Jesus Christ for wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." We must have no more in ourselves than the branch of a vine has; but must receive every thing from the stem into which we have been engrafted^d. We must "receive every thing out of the fulness that is in Christ^e," and must "live altogether by faith in the Son of God, who has loved us, and given himself for us^f."

But all this is very humiliating. Proud man does not like to be brought so low, as to depend wholly on another, and not at all on himself. We wish to have something of our own whereof we may boast. And to be reduced to a level with the vilest of the human race, so as to acknowledge ourselves as much indebted to Divine grace as they, is a humiliation to which we cannot endure to submit. Could we be saved in a way more congenial with our own feelings, we should be satisfied: but when it is said, "Wash and be clean," instead of accepting the tidings with gratitude, we spurn at them like Naaman, and go away in a rage^g.

To this however we must "*submit*^h:" for there is no other way of salvation for any child of manⁱ: and, if we will not come to Christ upon his own terms, we must remain for ever destitute of the blessings he has purchased for us^k.]

2. By not obeying its self-denying doctrines—

[Though the Gospel gives salvation freely, it does not leave us at liberty to neglect good works; on the contrary, "it teaches us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." Indeed, the sanctification it requires of us is as offensive to our carnal and worldly hearts, as the humiliation it imposes on us is to our pride. The object of the Gospel is, not merely to save men from death and hell, but to bring them back to a state of holy allegiance to their God, such as Adam experienced in Paradise. For this end it requires us to give up ourselves as living sacrifices unto God, and to be as *entirely* dedicated to his service as the burnt-offerings were, which were

^b Rev. iii. 17, 18.

^c Isai. lv. 1.

^d John xv. 5.

^e John i. 16.

^f Gal. ii. 20.

^g 2 Kings v. 10—13.

^h Rom. x. 3.

ⁱ Acts iv. 12. 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^k Rom. ix. 30—32.

wholly consumed on the altar¹. It enjoins us “neither to live unto ourselves, nor die unto ourselves;” but both in life and death to be altogether at the Lord’s disposal, for the accomplishment of his will, and for the promotion of his glory^m.

Now to this measure of holiness we have by nature a deep and rooted aversion. We have many earthly and sensual appetites, which plead for indulgence: and when we are required to “cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye,” and to “be holy as God himself is holy,” we reply, “This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” To “mortify our members upon earth,” and to “crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts,” is a work, which, as the very terms in which it is expressed intimate, is painful to flesh and blood: and to be told that without this we never can be Christ’s disciples, is most grating to our earsⁿ. But nothing less than this will suffice for the approving of ourselves upright in the sight of God.

I beseech you then, brethren, to “look diligently” to this matter, and not to come short of what the Gospel requires of you; for if you comply not both with its doctrines and its precepts, you can never partake of its privileges and its blessings.]

But respecting this Gospel, we are further cautioned,

II. Not to dishonour it after we have embraced it—

We are in danger of dishonouring it,

1. By heretical opinions—

[It is to these chiefly, though not exclusively, that I suppose “the root of bitterness” to refer. The expression is adopted from the Old Testament, where Moses cautions the Israelites against any “root among them bearing gall and wormwood,” and operating to the production of idolatry^o. Such sprang up very early in the Christian Church; even as St. Paul forewarned the elders of Ephesus to expect: “I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them^p.” Some there were who blended the Mosaic rites with the Gospel; others, who “denied the resurrection, saying that it was past already;” others “denied the Lord who bought them:” and great was “the trouble,” and extensive the defilement, which these heretics occasioned in the Church of Christ^q.

Such teachers there have been ever since in the Church, even to the present hour: and there is need of the utmost

¹ Rom. xii. 1.

^m Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

ⁿ Gal. v. 24.

^o Deut. xxix. 19.

^p Acts xx. 29, 30.

^q Gal. v. 7—10. 2 Tim. ii. 10—18. 2 Pet. ii. 1, 2.

care that we be not drawn aside by any of them "from the simplicity that is in Christ." Nothing can be more simple than the Gospel, when it is received in a humble child-like spirit. It requires nothing but a life of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a life of love both towards God and man for his sake. The whole is comprehended in those words, "faith working by love." But men are fond of making the Gospel a theatre for disputation; and they care not how far they divert the minds of their followers from "the truth as it is in Jesus," if only they may but prevail upon them to receive their dogmas. This is the true root of all the heresies which have distracted and defiled the Church of God in all ages.

But be ye on your guard, brethren, lest any such "root of bitterness" spring up among you. It is well called "a root of bitterness," for nothing that ever yet divided the human race has caused more "bitterness" than that which calls itself religion, but which, in fact, is only some partial or erroneous view of religion, which conceit has propagated, and bigotry enforced.]

2. By ungodly practices—

[Grievous have been the falls of many who have professed religion; and shocking the scandals which have at times prevailed in the Christian Church. Evils, which obtained amongst the ignorant and licentious Gentiles, were indulged, and vindicated, by them after they had embraced the Gospel of Christ; and many, like profane Esau, bartered away the inheritance of heaven for some worthless perishable good.

Thus it is at this day. Many things are pleaded for, which are as opposite to the holy nature of the Gospel as "fornication" itself: and the vanities of time are yet daily exchanged for the glories of eternity. In vain are we reminded how bitterly Esau at last bewailed his error; or how fruitless were his efforts to remedy the evil he had committed. We see nothing in his example which speaks to us; nor have we any ears for the instruction it conveys to us. The influence of temptation is too strong for us: our earthly and sensual hearts will plead for gratifications which the Gospel of Christ does not allow: and thus multitudes relinquish all the blessings of eternity, through their undue attachment to the things of time and sense.

But let not such be found amongst you. It is melancholy to see that Demas, after being twice united with Luke in the salutations of St. Paul, should be found, "through love to this present world," "making shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience." But such instances occur in every age of the

Church: and it requires continual watchfulness over our own hearts, and over each other too, to prevent the more frequent recurrence of similar apostasy. To all then I would recommend the example of St. Paul, who “kept his body under, and brought it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away^s.”]

The solemn hint with which our text concludes will furnish us with matter suited to ENFORCE the preceding subject—

1. Think what will ere long be your views of your present conduct, if you neglect the cautions which have been now suggested—

[Lightly as Esau once thought of his birthright, he saw at last that it was worthy to be “sought,” yea, to be “sought carefully” too, and *that* “with tears.” And what will be your views of heaven when you are lying on a bed of sickness, or, at all events, the very instant that your soul enters upon the invisible world? Will an obedience to the Gospel then appear so hard a condition, that all the glory of heaven could not recompense you for complying with it; or the mortification of some forbidden lust so insupportable a task, that hell itself, with the indulgence of that lust, was a better portion than heaven with the mortification of it? No: the pangs of Esau will be your pangs, when you find how bitter are the consequences of your folly, and how irreversible the doom that has been pronounced.

Not that repentance, provided it had been genuine, would have been unavailing for Esau as far as related to his eternal state. Isaac had, though unwittingly, conferred the rights of primogeniture on Jacob; and he would not reverse his word, notwithstanding all the bitter cries with which Esau importuned him to do so. And this is what is meant, when it is said, that Esau “found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.” Had he repented before God, he might have obtained pardon with God: as we also may do, through our Lord Jesus Christ. But, if we do not turn to God through Christ with our whole hearts, we shall find ere long the door of mercy shut against us, and in vain implore admission to that bliss which now we have despised^t.]

2. Yield to the Gospel, without delay, the obedience which it requires—

[Infinite are the blessings which it offers to us. And what are the sacrifices which we are called to make? — — — Be

^s 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^t Luke xiii. 24—27.

they ever so difficult or self-denying, they are not worth a thought in comparison of "the *grace* that shall be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ." The wise merchant-man parted with *all* for the pearl of great price. Do ye the same: and determine through grace, that whatever it may cost, you will not come short of it by refusing to make the sacrifices, or suffer either men or devils to rob you of it.]

MMCCCXXXIX.

THE TRANSCENDENT EXCELLENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION.

Heb. xii. 18—25. *Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (for they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake :) but ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.*

IN explaining the Holy Scriptures, it is often requisite that we carefully bear in mind, not only the immediate context, but the whole scope of the book in which any particular passage occurs. This is of the first importance in considering several expressions in the Epistle of St. James, and it is not unimportant in the passage before us.

The general scope of the Epistle to the Hebrews is, to encourage the Jewish Christians to hold fast their profession in the midst of all the persecutions they endured. And the principal argument used for their encouragement is, the great superiority of the Christian religion above that which they had

renounced. In the foregoing part of the epistle, this subject is treated at large: and, in the words which we have read, there is a kind of recapitulation of it, purposely introduced, in order to confirm the Hebrews in a steady adherence to the faith which they had embraced, and to shew them the dreadful danger of departing from it.

Hence, in elucidating this passage, we shall have occasion to shew,

I. The transcendent excellence of the Christian dispensation—

The circumstances which took place at the giving of the law, are all particularly and distinctly referred to^a: and they exhibit in very striking characters the nature of the law itself. The law was never given in order that the people might rest in it, or expect life from it; but that they might be made to know and feel their need of that better covenant which God would make with them under the Gospel dispensation. Instead of bringing men to God, it kept them at the greatest distance from him, not a soul being suffered to touch the mount on which he revealed himself, nor so much as a beast touching it without having instant death inflicted on him. Instead of producing any thing like filial love and confidence, it inspired only fear and terror, and, as the Apostle says, “gendered to bondage^b.” Even Moses himself said, “I exceedingly fear and quake.” Instead of offering life to any one, it was altogether “a ministration of condemnation and death^c.”

Now, says the Apostle, ye who have received the Gospel are not come to such a dispensation as that; “ye have not received the spirit of bondage *again* to fear^d :” but ye are come,

1. To a better place—

[Mount Sinai differed not from any other mount: it might be seen and touched like any other place. But not so the

^a Compare ver. 18—21. with Exod. xix. 14—25.

^b Gal. iv. 24.

^c 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9.

^d Rom. viii. 15.

mount to which those who believe in Christ are come: "they are come to Mount Sion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem," a place not visible to mortal eyes, nor like to any place which mortal hands have formed: it is a place formed by Almighty God for his own immediate residence, and for the fullest manifestations of his glory.]

2. To a nobler society—

[Angels indeed were present at the giving of the law: but the Jews had no communion with them: they were only God's agents for augmenting the terror of the scene^e. Their whole tribes too were there convened: but it was only that they might all be filled with the same dread of God's wrath, and be made to unite in that urgent request, that God would speak to them no more by an audible voice, but only through Moses as a mediator^f. But those who believe in Christ are come to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant." Yes, the glorified saints and angels all belong to the same blessed assembly to which believers are now called: and "God, even as a Judge," is no longer to them an object of dread, because they know that he at the same time is their Father: and they have "Jesus as their Mediator" with him; and "the new covenant" as the rule according to which they shall be dealt with by him. Here all is no longer fear and terror, but peace and joy.]

3. To far more exalted privileges—

[Moses, the morning after the giving of the law, offered burnt-offerings; with the blood of which he sprinkled both the book of the covenant which had been made with the people, and the people themselves, saying, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words^g." But what did this covenant avail them? The very blood with which it was ratified served only to testify against them as violating their own engagements, and making void every promise contained in it. But the blood of sprinkling to which the Christian is come, effectually removes from him all his sin, and prevails for his perfect reconciliation with God. The blood which Abel offered in sacrifice, received a visible and most honourable token of God's acceptance of it^h: but, however blessed that *external* testimony was, it was not worthy to be compared with that *internal* "witness of the

^e Acts vii. 53. with Ps. lxviii. 17.

^g Exod. xxiv. 4—8.

^f Deut. v. 22—28.

^h Heb. xi. 4.

Spirit," with which believers in Christ are sealed; which assures them of their adoption into God's family, and their everlasting fruition of his glory: it seals them, not for a time only, but unto the day of redemption; and is to them, not a seal only, but a pledge and earnest and foretaste of heaven itselfⁱ. The very same eternal love which "elects them to obedience," elects them also to this "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ^k."]

The Apostle, however, not content with exhibiting thus the transcendent excellence of Christianity, proceeds to point out,

II. The indispensable necessity of paying to it the attention it requires—

The warning which he gives to the Hebrews is most solemn; "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh:" and the argument with which he enforces it is most awful; "for, if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven."

Hear then the warning—

[Look into the history of the Hebrews: see what became of those who refused obedience to the Sinai covenant: they perished; even that whole nation perished, (of those at least who had attained the age of full maturity,) with the exception of two. For one single transgression of it was Moses himself excluded from the earthly Canaan^l. The extreme severity of the law against any wilful and presumptuous violation of its commands, is again and again held forth as a warning to us under the Gospel dispensation, and particularly in the epistle before us: "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation^m?" So again; "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace?" Well may such warnings as these sink down into our ears, and make us tremble at the thought of disobedience to the Gospel covenant!]

ⁱ Eph. i. 13, 14.

^k 1 Pet. i. 2.

^l Deut. xxxii. 50, 51.

^m Heb. ii. 2, 3.

ⁿ Heb. x. 28, 29.

Acknowledge also the justice of it—

[Think how the Christian covenant has been delivered: not by a terrific voice, uttered from a cloud by a Being that was invisible, but by the Lord Jesus Christ himself descending from the highest heavens to make it known to us in the mild accents of love and mercy. Think too of its contents. To what does it call us, but to a conformity with the holy angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect? It brings us into favour with God, precisely as they are. It invites us to begin their employments now, and even on earth to participate their bliss. It makes every provision for the end: it offers pardon, and peace, and righteousness, and glory, to all who by faith will lay hold upon it. Say then, what do not they deserve who refuse to listen to invitations like these? Verily, we cannot but acknowledge, that, if the judgments denounced against the disobedient Israelites were just, much more must the heaviest judgments that can ever be inflicted upon us be just, if we refuse to listen to Him who speaks to us with such astonishing condescension and grace.]

We must not omit to notice, that the Apostle here takes for granted, respecting every true Christian, that he is thus come to Mount Sion.

Permit me then, in CONCLUSION,

1. To make this a matter of inquiry—

[Have you indeed come thus to Mount Sion? Have you turned your backs on Mount Sinai, from a deep conviction that you are condemned by the law, and have no hope at all but from the gracious provisions of the Gospel? Have you obtained an insight into the nature of true religion, as consisting in a communion with God and with the heavenly hosts, and an actual participation of the mind, the spirit, the blessedness of heaven? Ah! how rarely is Christianity viewed in this light! It is regarded rather as a mere system of restraints enforced with terror, than as an earnest and antepast of the heavenly bliss! I pray you, not to imagine that you have ever yet set out aright, if you have not thus passed from Mount Sinai unto Sion, and from Moses unto Christ.]

2. To address you under the supposition which is here made—

[I will suppose, that “you are come unto Mount Sion.” Yet much would I guard you, as the Apostle did the Hebrews, against yielding to any species of temptation that may deprive you of the blessings to which, according to your Christian profession, you are entitled. It is no uncommon thing for persons to make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience,

even after they have for some time maintained, in appearance at least, an upright walk and conversation. But beware lest ye be in any wise hindered in running the race that is set before you: difficulties ye must meet with, both within and without: and it is well that you do meet with them; for how else shall your fidelity to God be tried? But ask yourselves, what any of the holy angels would do if they were in your place? or what any of the spirits of the just that are now made perfect would reply to those who should either by menaces or allurements attempt to turn them from God? You cannot doubt. Be ye then like them, to whose society you are brought, and with whom you are to dwell through everlasting ages: and as ye are already come to the very gate of heaven, see that "an entrance into it be ministered unto you abundantly through Jesus Christ our Lord."]

MMCCCXL.

ABEL'S SACRIFICE AND CHRIST'S COMPARED.

Heb. xii. 22, 24. *Ye are come to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

AS the Christian dispensation differs widely from that of Moses as to the manner in which it was promulgated, so does it most essentially differ with respect to the spirit and temper which it is calculated to produce in the minds of men. The terrors of Mount Sinai were suited to impress the Jews with a servile fear; as their whole system of rites and ceremonies was, to keep them under bondage. But the mild genius of the Gospel introduces us at once to peace and liberty. In the passage before us the Apostle exemplifies this remark in many particulars; the last of which demands our attention at this time. We propose to shew,

I. The efficacy of Abel's blood—

By "the blood of Abel" we are not to understand *his own* blood, but the blood of his sacrifice—

[The generality of commentators indeed explain this as relating to Abel's blood, which cried for vengeance against his murderous brother^a. But to commend the blood of Christ

^a Gen. iv. 10.

in this view, would indeed be no commendation at all. The history of Abel informs us, that he offered one of the firstlings of his flock *in addition* to the same kind of offering as Cain brought^b, manifesting thereby not merely his obligations to God as a creature, but his conscious guilt as a sinner, and his faith in that Lamb of God, who was to take away the sin of the world^c. That sacrifice of his was honoured with very peculiar tokens of God's acceptance^d; and may therefore fitly be referred to as illustrative of the sacrifice of Christ.]

It spake to him that offered it very excellent things—

[Had not the marks of God's favour been such as were most desirable, Cain would not have so cruelly envied his brother the attainment of them. But they manifestly declared to Abel the acceptance of his person, and an approbation of his service. What could be more delightful than such a testimony to a pious soul? Had life itself been the price of such a blessing, it had been well bestowed.]

But the excellence of Abel's sacrifice is far surpassed by,

II. The superior efficacy of Christ's—

The blood of Christ is here, as in other places^e, called “the blood of sprinkling”—

[There is in this place an allusion to the sprinkling of blood on the book and on the people, when God made his covenant with the Jewish nation^f. The blood of Christ is sprinkled upon us, when we enter into covenant with God; and it binds God, if we may so say, to fulfil to us his promises, while it binds us on the other hand to obey his precepts.]

This speaks to us incomparably better things than the blood of Abel—

[Great as the expressions of God's love to Abel were in consequence of the sacrifice which that righteous man had offered, they were not to be compared with those which we receive through Christ. There was no inherent virtue in his sacrifice; its efficacy was derived from the relation it bore to

^b This is well proved by Dr. Kennicott, in his dissertation on Cain and Abel.

^c Heb. xi. 4.

^d Perhaps fire might be sent from heaven to consume the sacrifice. See instances of this, Lev. ix. 24. 1 Kings xviii. 38. 1 Chron. xxi. 26. and 2 Chron. vii. 1.

^e 1 Pet. i. 2.

^f Compare Exod. xxiv. 6—8. with Heb. ix. 18—22.

Christ; and the blessings, enjoyed by means of it, were rather typical than real. The continuance of God's favour to him was to be secured only by a constant repetition of the same sacrifices; nor could he obtain a full and perfect peace of conscience even by their means^g: but Christ, by his one sacrifice of himself, has perfected for ever them that are sanctified^h. Besides, whatever Abel's sacrifice spake, it spake to him alone: whereas the blood of Christ speaks to the whole world, and proclaims acceptance to all who will trust in it for salvation. Thus, while the good things which the blood of Abel spake, were only *typical, temporary, and personal*, those which the blood of Christ speaks, are *real, permanent, and universal*.]

Nor will *our* concern in this matter appear unimportant, if we consider,

III. The interest which the believer has in it—

Every believer “comes to” this blood of sprinkling—

[The efficacy of the Redeemer's blood is not a matter of speculation, but of experience, to every true Christian. As Moses and the Israelites “came to” Mount Sinai in order to make a covenant with God, so do we come to the blood of sprinkling: *they* came as persons redeemed by God out of the house of bondage: *we* as redeemed from death and hell: *they* came to take God as their God, and to give up themselves to him as his people; and *we* come with precisely the same view: *they* offered sacrifices and were sprinkled with the blood, in token that they deserved to die, and could be cleansed only by the blood of atonement; and *we* come in the same manner to the blood of Christ: *they* looked through the typical sacrifices to him who was in due time to be offered; and *we* look to him, who in due time was offered for our sins upon the cross.]

In coming thus to Christ we experience all the efficacy of his blood—

[Were we afar off? we are brought nigh to Godⁱ: Were we enemies to God? we are reconciled to him^k: Were we condemned for our iniquities? we are now justified^l: Were our minds filled with a sense of guilt and a dread of punishment? our hearts are now sprinkled from an evil conscience^m, and enjoy peace with Godⁿ: Were we strangers to communion with God? we now have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus^o: Were we enslaved by evil habits? we are

^g Heb. ix. 9.

^h Heb. x. 14.

ⁱ Eph. ii. 13.

^k Col. i. 20.

^l Rom. v. 9.

^m Heb. x. 22.

ⁿ Rom. v. 1.

^o Heb. x. 19.

now purged from dead works to serve the living God^p: Did a sentence of eternal misery await us? we now look forward to the fruits of an eternal redemption^q. Such is the interest that the Christian has in the blood of sprinkling; and in this sense it may be said of every believer, that he is "come to" it.]

APPLICATION—

1. Let us inquire whether we be indeed come to the blood of sprinkling—

[It is not every nominal Christian, that has approached God in this way: "all are not Israel who are of Israel." The outward form indeed which was observed by Moses is not required under the Christian dispensation; nor need we feel his terror, in order to obtain his comforts: but we must seriously draw nigh to God, sprinkling ourselves, as it were, with the blood of Christ, and professing our entire reliance upon that for our acceptance with him. Yea, we must go to God in the very spirit and temper in which Abel offered his sacrifice; not merely thanking him with pharisaic pride, as Cain may be supposed to have done; but smiting on our breasts like the Publican, and imploring mercy for Christ's sake. Have we done *this*? Or rather, are we doing it yet daily? On this depends our happiness, both in this world and in the world to come. If God at this moment gives us the witness of his Spirit in our consciences that this is indeed our experience, let us rejoice in such a testimony, and be thankful for it. But if our consciences condemn us, O! let us delay no longer, but instantly sprinkle ourselves with that precious blood, on account of which he will speak peace unto our souls.]

2. Let us endeavour to fulfil the obligations which this blood entails upon us—

[When Moses sprinkled the Jews, and read to them the book of the covenant, they said, "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient:" O that there may be in us also such a heart,—such a heart, I mean, not merely to promise, but to perform our promises! Certainly this is the end for which Christ shed his blood; he died, not merely to bring us to the enjoyment of privileges, but to lead us to the performance of our duties; "he gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." Let us then strive to walk worthy of our high calling; and let "the love of Christ constrain us to live unto him, who died for us and rose again."]

^p Heb. ix. 14.

^q Heb. ix. 12, 15.

MMCCCXLI.

GOD TO BE SERVED WITH REVERENTIAL FEAR.

Heb. xii. 28, 29. *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear : for our God is a consuming fire.*

THE Christian world are little aware how much we are indebted to the holy Apostles, or rather to God, by whose inspiration they wrote, for the light which they have thrown upon the prophecies of the Old Testament. To this hour should we have been almost as much in the dark respecting the import of them as the Ethiopian Eunuch was, if God had not sent us persons authorized and empowered to unfold their true meaning. The passage which that Gentile proselyte was reading when Philip joined himself to his chariot, was as clear as any part of Isaiah's prophecies : yet, when asked by Philip, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" he replied, "How can I, except some man should guide me^a?" So we should have still been at a loss to know of whom the prophets spake in numberless passages^b, if God had not raised up holy men to give us the desired information. Let us take for instance, the prophecy which is cited by the Apostle in the verses before our text. It is taken from the Prophet Haggai, and is adduced by St. Paul in order to confirm his preceding declarations respecting the superiority of the Christian dispensation above that of the Jews. And we may well suppose that an uninspired Jew, if conversant with the Scriptures, would have understood the passage as referring to the Messiah^c. The construction which he would have put upon it would probably have been to this effect : 'God shook the earth when he established the Mosaic dispensation : but, when he shall introduce the Messiah himself, he will do it with far greater convulsions of universal nature.' But

^a Acts viii. 28—31.^b Acts viii. 34.^c Hag. ii. 6, 7.

let us see the explanation of it which the Apostle has given us: He first somewhat alters the words, in order to make them express more fully the mind of God in them; and then he gives us this interpretation of them: "This word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." Thus he shews us that not any convulsion of nature was intended, like that which took place at Mount Sinai; but the total removal of the whole civil and ecclesiastical polity of the Jews was predicted, in order to make way for the immoveable and everlasting kingdom of the Messiah. Then, on the passage thus explained, he founds this exhortation: "Wherefore we receiving a *kingdom which cannot be moved*, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire."

The points to be especially noticed in this passage are,

I. The privilege which all true Christians have received—

"They have received a kingdom which cannot be moved:" they have received it,

1. As that to which they are to submit—

[The Lord Jesus Christ is he of whom Jehovah has said, "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion^d." And "his kingdom admits of no change." The dispensation which had been introduced by Moses, "waxed old, and vanished away;" but that which Christ has established is ever "new^e." "His dominion," says the prophet, "is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed^f." Men and devils will no doubt combine for its destruction: but "the gates of hell shall never prevail against it^g." — — —

To this kingdom all true believers belong. They once were vassals of the god of this world: but they have been "translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son." Their language now is, "Other lords besides thee

^d Ps. ii. 6.

^e Heb. viii. 13.

^f Dan. vii. 14.

^g Matt. xvi. 18.

have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name^h." Into the name of Christ they have been baptized; and to his service have they willingly devoted themselves; engaging to fulfil his will, and even to lay down their lives, if need be, for his sake.]

2. As that which they are to inherit—

[All the blessings of it are theirs: and it is administered altogether for their good. The King himself has their interest in view, as much as if he had not another subject in his realm to occupy his attention. Their enemies are all restrained, and shall all, not excepting Satan himself, ere long be bruised under their feet. All the protection which they can need, and all the provision which their souls can desire, are secured to them: "they dwell on high; their place of defence is the munition of rocks: their bread is daily given them, and their water is sureⁱ." Nor can these be moved, any more than the kingdom itself can. Neither time nor chance can impair the blessings themselves, or rob them of the enjoyment of them. The pardon, the peace, the holiness, the glory, are theirs, not for time only, but for eternity — — — And this is the portion, not of some few favoured individuals only, as Prophets and Apostles, but of every believer, however poor, however unworthy. To the whole body of believers, without exception, it is said, "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give *you* the kingdom^k." Hear this, ye who are poor in this world; and survey the riches to which God has chosen you^l: in respect of your earthly state, ye may be said to be "upon a dunghill: but God has taken you thence, to set you among the princes^m." "*Ye have received a kingdom:*" "Christ has appointed to you a kingdom, even as his Father has appointed unto him a kingdomⁿ;" and has ordained that "you shall sit with him upon his throne, as he sitteth on his Father's throne^o:" ye may be "beggars," as it respects temporal possessions; but ye are "kings^p:" and respecting all of you, Jehovah himself says, "I know your poverty; but ye are rich^q."]

Let not any, however, be so elated with their privilege as to overlook,

II Their duty as connected with it—

"We must serve God with reverence and godly fear"—

^h Isai. xxvi. 13.

^l Jam. ii. 5.

^o Rev. iii. 21.

ⁱ Isai. xxxiii. 16.

^m 1 Sam. ii. 8.

^p Rev. i. 6.

^k Luke xii. 32.

ⁿ Luke xxii. 29.

^q Rev. ii. 9.

[Privilege and duty are so connected, that they can never under any circumstances be separated from each other; and any attempt to separate them will infallibly issue in our ruin. A kingdom has been given us, it is true: and "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." But ye must "serve God," and serve him too "with reverence and godly fear." We must not presume upon his mercy, or take occasion from it to indulge in carelessness and supineness. We must never forget with what a God we have to do. "He is a great God, and greatly to be feared." Though his dispensations are altered, he himself is not altered: "He is a consuming fire" now, as much as he was in the day that he proclaimed his law from Mount Sinai: and he must still "be had in reverence of all them that are round about him^t." True, indeed, we are not now to "fear and quake before him," as the Israelites, and Moses himself, then did: for "he has not given us the spirit of bondage *again* to fear, but a Spirit of adoption, whereby we may cry, Abba, Father^s:" but still we must "stand in awe of him^t," and fear to offend him, knowing that "he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity without the utmost abhorrence of it^u." In whomsoever wilful sin is found, he will visit it with fiery indignation; and most of all in those who profess themselves his servants^x. "If we regard iniquity in our hearts, he will not hear us," or acknowledge us. We must seek to "be holy, as he is holy;" and "perfect, as he is perfect:" and the circumstance of our having been "sealed by him unto the day of redemption," is a reason why we should be more than ever careful, not either by word or deed, and, if possible, not even by a thought, to "grieve his holy Spirit^y." Our labour should be to have "our every thought brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ^z." It is in this way alone that we can serve God "acceptably:" and in this way alone that we can prove our title to the kingdom which we profess to have received.]

For strength to do this, we must seek his grace from day to day—

[We have no strength in ourselves even for a good thought^a: "Without Christ we can do nothing^b." But there is a fulness of grace treasured up in him; and out of his fulness must we continually receive those supplies of grace which we stand in need of^c. We must not be satisfied with such a measure of grace as may suffice to bring us to God: but must labour for

^r Ps. lxxxix. 7.

^s Rom. viii. 15.

^t Ps. ii. 11. and iv. 4.

^u Hab. i. 13.

^x Amos iii. 2.

^y Eph. iv. 30.

^z 2 Cor. x. 5.

^a 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^b John xiv. 5.

^c Col. i. 19. with John i. 16.

such a measure as may enable us to serve him, and to “serve him acceptably” to the latest hour of our lives. Especially must we seek a meekness of spirit, an humility of mind, a tenderness of conscience, a purity of heart, an hatred of sin, an abhorrence of ourselves on account of sin, a holy desire to please God, a love to his will, a delight in his service, and an utter contempt even of life itself in comparison of his honour and glory. But these are attainments which he alone can give: therefore we must cry day and night unto him for more and more grace, and must labour for them only in a dependence on his good Spirit.

To this state of mind we must be brought by the consideration of the unbounded mercies bestowed upon us: “*Having received a kingdom,*” we must thus seek his grace, and thus labour joyfully to fulfil his will: for so the Apostle elsewhere teaches us: “I beseech you by the mercies of God that ye present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable unto God, as your reasonable service^d.”]

The CONCLUDING DECLARATION in our text deserving more especial notice, I will draw your attention to it,

1. To augment your thankfulness for the Gospel of Christ—

[We see how terrible the presence of God was when he appeared as a consuming fire upon Mount Sinai. But, how much more terrible is it in that world where he is inflicting vengeance both on men and devils as the monuments of his wrath! Yet that is the view of him which we should have had to all eternity, if the Lord Jesus Christ had not interposed to effect our reconciliation with him, and to restore us to his favour——Can we reflect on this, and not adore that blessed Saviour, who “bore our sins in his own body on the tree,” and “died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God?” Think for a moment of that place which he has “ordained of old, the pile whereof is fire and much wood, and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it^e.” Think of the state of the souls which are confined there, all of them drinking “of the wine of God’s wrath, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, and tormented with fire and brimstone, having no rest, and the smoke of their torment ascending up for ever and ever^f:” and then let us ask ourselves, “Who amongst us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who amongst us can dwell with everlasting burnings^g?” Verily, if we would more habituate ourselves

^d Rom. xii. 1.

^e Isai. xxx. 33.

^f Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

^g Isai. xxxiii. 14.

to consider the justice, and holiness, and majesty of our God, we should know no bounds to our gratitude for the work of redemption: our every thought would be thankfulness; and our every word be praise — — —]

2. To preserve upon your minds a holy dread of sin—

[Still must it be said, as in the days of old, “The Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God^h :” and we should never for a moment lose sight of him under that character. It is fit that he should be jealous, and suffer no rival in our hearts. In harbouring any unhallowed lust, we are as great enemies to our own happiness as we are to his glory: and he would have loved us less, if he had given us any reason to hope for impunity in the ways of sin. Be ye then jealous over yourselves with a godly jealousy, lest there be found in you any thing which is displeasing in his sight. Let your conscience be tender even as the apple of your eye: and if but a mote come upon it, let it not abide there for a moment; but weep it away with tears of penitential sorrow, and wash it away with the blood of Christ, which alone can cleanse you even from the smallest sin. Bear in mind, that what ye are in respect of holiness, that ye are in the sight of God: and recollecting, that “his eyes are as a flame of fire,” and that “he weighs, not your actions” only, but “even your spirits” also, “be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blamelessⁱ.”]

^h Deut. iv. 24.

ⁱ 2 Pet. iii. 14.

MMCCCXLII.

COMPASSION TO THE DISTRESSED INCULCATED.

Heb. xiii. 3. *Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.*

IN the first ages of Christianity persecution raged to a degree that we at this time have little conception of: bonds and imprisonment were no uncommon lot, especially amongst those who were active in the service of their Lord. The loss of all things was also not unfrequently added to the other trials of the saints; so that their afflictions were greatly multiplied and exceeding heavy. At such a season, it was incumbent on every member of the Church to

compassionate the distresses of his afflicted brethren, and by a participation of their burthens to lighten their pressure, and to alleviate the sorrows occasioned by them. To this they might well be stimulated by the consideration that they themselves were constantly exposed to the same trials, and might soon need the same relief which they were administering to others. Through the goodness of God *we* know but little of these trials. The persecutions of the present day amount to little more than contempt and hatred, and in some few instances a little outward opposition to our worldly interests. Still however there are afflictions of other kinds in abundance to which we all are subject; and under which it becomes us all to manifest the tenderest compassion towards each other, not knowing how soon it may become our own lot to need the sympathy which we ourselves have exercised. In this view, the exhortation in our text deserves the attention of every child of man. Let us notice in it,

I. The duty inculcated—

Compassion towards our suffering fellow-creatures is a duty universally acknowledged. If the household of faith are entitled to a preference in our regards, as certainly they are^a, our benevolence is not to be restricted to them: it is to be exercised generally towards all the sons and daughters of affliction; and *that* too in a way of,

1. Tender sympathy—

[We should “remember them that are in bonds” or afflictions of any kind, not with a transient sigh, or a few customary expressions of condolence, but “as actually bound with them,” and as being ourselves partakers of their sorrows. We can read of the desolations and ravages of war, or of the miseries occasioned by storms and tempests, and pass them over almost without any emotion, and in a few minutes utterly forget them. But, if we felt aright, we should enter into all the troubles of the sufferers, just as if we ourselves were in their very state and condition. Paint to yourselves the anguish of shipwrecked mariners, expecting every moment to be their last: or, if their

^a Gal. vi. 10.

feelings may be supposed to be so acute as not to be capable of being transfused into the bosom of one who is not exposed to such perils, conceive of persons immured in dungeons, or racked with pains and destitute of all needful succour; or contemplate the widow bereaved of all that she held dear in this world, and of all that she relied on for the support of herself and her helpless offspring; I say, conceive of sorrows as brought home to your own bosom, and as experienced in your own soul; and then you will see how you ought to realize in your minds the miseries of others, and to pant for an opportunity to relieve them.]

2. Fervent prayer—

["Intercession," we are told, "should be made for all men;" but more especially should it be so in behalf of those, whose troubles render them objects of more than ordinary compassion. St. James says, "Is any sick among you, let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick: and, if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him^b." You well know how a man will plead with God for the wife of his bosom, or for his beloved child, whose dissolution he apprehends to be fast approaching. Thus should we enter into the distresses of others also, and should plead with God in their behalf. David did thus even in behalf of his very enemies: "When they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth, and I humbled my soul with fasting^c:" and in this way should we also make our prayer unto God, in the hope that he will interpose effectually in their behalf, and bestow on them the blessings, which it is not within the power of any finite creature to impart.]

3. Active services—

[We are not to say, "Be ye warmed, and be ye filled, and at the same time withhold" from our brethren the aid which we are able to bestow^d: such compassion as that is mere hypocrisy. Our Lord tells us in what way our sympathy should display itself; "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me^e." All indeed have it not in their power to exert themselves to the same extent: some have more leisure, and more ability, than others: but all can do something for their poor neighbours: some friendly service they can render; some word of comfort

^b Jam. v. 14, 15.

^c Ps. xxxv. 13.

^d Jam. ii. 15, 16.

^e Matt. xxv. 35, 36.

they can speak: and what they cannot administer in their own persons, they may procure through the instrumentality of others^f — — — At all events, if it be only a cup of cold water that we can bestow, it should be given with a zeal and tenderness that shall evince the strength of an internal principle, and the wish that our means were more adequate to the occasion.

The proper example for us to follow, is that of the Macedonians, of whom the Apostle testifies, that, notwithstanding they were themselves “in a great trial of affliction, and in deep poverty, yet abounded unto the riches of liberality: and that to their power, yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves; and prayed the Apostle with much entreaty to take upon himself the ministration of their bounty to the saints^g.” This is the point to be aimed at: there must first be a willing mind: and, where that is, God will accept the offering, however small^h.]

Such is the duty here inculcated. Let us now attend to,

II. The consideration with which it is enforced—

When the Apostle says, “Do this,” as being yourselves also in the body, he must be understood as intimating,

1. That we ourselves are exposed to the same afflictions as others—

[And this is true respecting every living man. No one is exempt from trouble. If any man was ever justified in saying, “I shall die in my nest,” it was Job: yet behold he, with all his wealth and power, was in a few days reduced to the most abject state that can be imagined. There are ten thousand sources of affliction which God may open, and cause our souls to be deluged with it in an instant. Our bodies may be racked with disease, or our spirits be overwhelmed with domestic troubles: or, whilst all external things are prospering, our souls may be so bowed down with a sense of sin, and so agitated with a dread of God’s judgments, that we may hate our very existence, and “choose strangling rather than life.” Indeed whoever he be that thinks with David, “My mountain stands strong, I shall not be moved;” he may expect, that God will speedily “hide his face from him; and that trouble shall ere long come upon him,” as the punishment of his iniquity.]

^f If this were in aid of a *Benevolent Society*, or any other Charity, the particular benefits of the Institution, as imparting what no mere individual could impart, may be stated here.

^g 2 Cor. viii. 1—4.

^h 2 Cor. viii. 12.

2. That what measure we mete to others, we may expect to have meted to ourselves—

[Mankind at large feel a far greater disposition to exert themselves in behalf of a man of active benevolence, than they do for one whose regards have terminated on himself alone. But it is not on the good dispositions of men that we are called to rely. God himself has engaged, that what we do for others, he will accept as done to himself; and “that what we lend to him, he will repay us again.” Very remarkable are his promises to this effect: “Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive: and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. *The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing; and make all his bed in his sickness*.” The language of the Prophet Isaiah is yet stronger still: “If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, (observe, it is not our *money* only, but our *soul*, with all its tenderest emotions, that is to be drawn forth,) and if thou satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day: and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not^k.” Here Almighty God himself is pledged to recompense into our bosom the kindness which we shew to others: and “he will recompense it in full measure, pressed down, and running over.” If then we would have consolations ministered to us in our troubles, let us labour to impart them to our afflicted brethren: for “what we sow, we shall reap;” if we supply the wants of others, God will supply ours^l; and if “we cast our bread upon the waters, we shall be sure to find it after many days.”]

For your direction in reference to this duty, we beg leave to offer the following HINTS:

1. Do not undervalue the grace of charity—

[It is too often overlooked, not only by the world at large, but also by many who profess godliness; who imagine, that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is all that is needful for their best interests. But let me say, that, whatever faith a man may have, “if he have not love also, real, active, self-denying love, he is no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.” Only recollect how great a stress St. James lays on “visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction,” when he declares, that “pure and undefiled religion” mainly consists

ⁱ Ps. xli. 1—3.

^k Isai. lviii. 10, 11.

^l Phil. iv. 14, 19.

in such offices; and you will never be satisfied till you attain this heavenly disposition, nor ever think that you can exercise it too much.]

2. Do not overvalue it—

[If you put your own benevolence in the place of Christ, and rely on that to purchase the remission of your sins, you will then indeed build on a foundation of sand. Know, that however much you may abound in acts of benevolence, “you are still unprofitable servants, who have done only what it was your duty to do.” If you really seek the glory of God in what you do, your services will come up with acceptance before him, and they will be to him as an odour of a sweet smell. But you must never forget that “your goodness extendeth not to God,” nor can confer any obligation upon him. On the contrary, the more you do for him, the more you are indebted to him; because “all your power either to will or do what is good, is from him alone.” “It is not you that do it, but the grace of God that is with you.”]

3. Endeavour to abound in it more and more—

[See the character of holy Job: “When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him: the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me; and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy^m.” O what a lovely character was that! What a bright resemblance of the Saviour, “who went about doing good!” Dear brethren, set this example before you, and strive to imitate it to the utmost of your power. Thus will you shine as lights in the world; and thus “fulfilling the law of Christⁿ,” you will ensure his approbation in the day of judgment^o.]

^m Job xxix. 11—13.

ⁿ Gal. vi. 3.

^o Heb. vi. 10. 1 Tim. vi. 17—19.

MMCCCXLIII.

GOD’S PROMISED PRESENCE AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO DUTY.

Heb. xiii. 5, 6. *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

THE end of knowledge is practice: and hence the Apostle closes all his epistles with practical exhor-

tations. The argumentative part of this epistle terminated at the close of the preceding chapter. This chapter begins with some particular exhortations suited to the Hebrews at that time. The advice contained in our text is suited to the Church in every state and every age: and the encouragement with which it is enforced, gives it a more than common interest. In truth, it is the promised presence and assistance of God, which is our great incentive to every duty; since without his aid we can do nothing, but with it can effect whatsoever God himself requires of us.

Let us consider,

I. The promise here recorded—

The promise was originally given to Joshua: but in our text it is represented as spoken to each of us. And in this light it ought to be viewed: for it was not given to Joshua as a mere insulated individual, but as the head of God's people, whom he was conducting into Canaan: and between them and us there is a close resemblance: they were about to conflict with many enemies, whom they must destroy, before they could possess the promised land: and we also must sustain many conflicts before we can attain the full enjoyment of the heavenly Canaan. To us therefore there is the same need of the promise, as to him; and to us also is there the same right and title; seeing that it was spoken for the encouragement of all God's Israel to the end of time.

The promise that God "will not leave us nor forsake us," imports that he will be ever with us,

1. By the operations of his providence—

[There is not any thing in the whole universe which is not under his controul. "Not even a sparrow falls to the ground" without his special appointment: and "the very hairs of our head are all numbered." Circumstances indeed may occur which may cause us to tremble for the issue of them: but he will so overrule them all, as to "make them eventually work together for our good^a." We may be reduced almost to

^a Rom. viii. 28.

despair; and may be ready to say with the Church of old, "The Lord hath forsaken and forgotten us^b:" but he will ere long force us to acknowledge that such fears were the fruit only of "our own infirmity^c;" and that the very things which we complained of as "against us," were no other than his appointed means for accomplishing all his gracious designs towards us^d. Our dangers may be as imminent as those of Israel at the Red Sea; but that shall be the time for Him to open for us a way to escape from them. Our wants may be as urgent as those of Israel afterwards in the wilderness; but that shall be the time for giving us manna from heaven, and water from the rock. The time for any interposition may seem to have actually elapsed; but still "in the mount the Lord shall be seen," precisely as he was when he arrested the uplifted arm of Abraham, and restored his Isaac to his embrace. "The vision may tarry; but never beyond the appointed and the fittest time^e."]

2. By the communications of his grace—

[These are necessary for us, and must be renewed to us day by day: and if for one moment they be suspended, we must inevitably fall. But God will not withdraw from his waiting and praying people. He may indeed suffer temptations to arise, such as shall threaten to plunge us into irremediable ruin; and he may even permit Satan for a time to prevail against us; but still he will not utterly forsake us; but will restore our souls, and make our very falls subservient to the augmenting of our humility and watchfulness throughout the remainder of our lives, and to the qualifying of us for warning, and exhorting, and comforting others with increased effect^f. So also he may permit our trials to abide; and, though entreated by us ever so much, may not see fit to remove them. But "his grace shall be sufficient for us," and shall be the more magnified in us, in proportion as our conflicts are severe, and our victories conspicuous^g. He may, for wise and gracious purposes, hide his face from us; but it shall be only for a little moment, that the riches of his grace may be the more abundantly displayed in the subsequent manifestations of his love and favour^h. If it be asked, why he will thus continue his loving-kindness to them? We answer, "For his own sake," and because "he changeth notⁱ;" as it is said, "He will not forsake his people; because it hath pleased him to make you his people^k."]

^b Isai. xlix. 14.

^c Ps. lxxvii. 7—10.

^d Gen. xlii. 36.

^e Hab. ii. 3.

^f Luke xxii. 31, 32.

^g 2 Cor. xii. 7—9.

^h Isai. liv. 7—10.

ⁱ Mal. iii. 6. Jam. i. 17. Rom. xi. 29.

^k 1 Sam. xii. 22.

That this promise may produce its due effects, let us consider,

II. The use we should make of it—

Innumerable are the benefits to be derived from it: but we shall specify only two: it should encourage us to discard, as unworthy of us,

1. All inordinate desires—

[“Our whole conversation should be without covetousness or discontent.” We should desire nothing which God has not seen fit to give us, nor murmur at any thing which he has ordained for us. For, what can we want, or what can we have to complain of, whilst he is with us? Could any worldly good add to our happiness, or give any security to us for its continuance? Would treasures, however great, be a richer portion than he? or would the loss of them be felt, if it led us to seek more entirely our happiness in him? “When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble¹?” If we have but the light of his countenance lifted up upon us, nothing can augment, nor can any thing diminish, our bliss. Many of these Hebrews had “taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods:” and thousands in every age have been able to testify from their own blessed experience, that “as their afflictions have abounded, so also have their consolations abounded by Christ^m.” Let us only possess “the Lord for the portion of our inheritance and of our cup; and have that lot maintained to us;” and however small our portion be as it respects this world, we shall have reason to say, “The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, and I have a goodly heritageⁿ.”]

2. All anxious fears—

[The ungodly imagine that they can prevail against the Lord's people: but they are no more than an axe or saw in the hands of him that useth it: they can do more than our God and Father is pleased to do by them^o. Now who will tremble at a sword that is in his father's hands? If indeed our God were ever weary, or absent, or disinclined to interpose for us, or if the creature could effect any thing without his special permission, there were some reason for fear: but when he is as “our shade upon our right hand;” when he is as “a wall of fire round about us, and the glory in the midst of us^p,” whom shall we fear? “Who can have access to harm us^q,” if we be hid under the shadow of His wings? “If He be for us, who can be against us^r?” Whatever confederacies then may

¹ Job xxxiv. 29.

^m 2 Cor. i. 5.

ⁿ Ps. xvi. 5, 6.

^o Isai. x. 15.

^p Zech. ii. 5.

^q 1 Pet. iii. 13—15.

^r Rom. viii. 31.

be against us, whether of men or devils, we need not fear: in Him, as our sanctuary, we may deride their efforts, and defy their malice^s. What should be the state of our minds, the holy Psalmist has shewn us; “Be merciful unto me, O God; for man would *swallow me up*: he fighting daily oppresses me. Mine enemies would *daily* swallow me up: for they be *many* that fight against me, O thou Most High. But, what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God will I praise his word: in God I have put my trust: I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: *this I know*; for God is for me. In God will I praise his word; in the Lord will I praise his word. In God have I put my trust; I will not be afraid what man can do unto me^t.”]

SEE then from hence,

1. Of what importance it is to treasure up the promises in our minds—

[The promises of God are our great support under trials, and at the same time our great encouragements to fulfil our duty; since they assure us of all needful aid, both for the sustaining of the one, and the performance of the other. It is by them that we are enabled to cleanse ourselves from sin^u; and by them to attain the image of God upon our souls^x. Let us then lay hold of them; and, to whomsoever they may have been spoken in the first instance, appropriate them to ourselves. Let us rest upon them, and plead them before God, as Jacob did^y: and know that “in Christ they are all yea, and amen^z,” as unchangeable as God himself. O what a treasure does that man possess who has laid up in his mind the most comprehensive promises of his God! He can be in no trouble, wherein he has not abundant consolation; and in no want, wherein he has not an adequate supply. O beloved, let the word of Christ, and the promises of your God, “dwell in you richly in all wisdom.” Mark the emphatic manner in which they are pronounced. Look at that before us in particular: as recorded in our translation, it is strong: but as it is in the original, its force exceeds the powers of our language to express: there are no less than five negatives to confirm the negation^a. When will God violate *that* promise—“Heaven and earth shall pass away; but not one jot or tittle of that promise shall ever fail^b?”]

2. How truly blessed is a life of faith—

[What a source of misery to mankind is a covetous and discontented spirit! and what a prey are they to trouble, who have

^s Isai. viii. 12—14.

^t Ps. lvi. 1—4, 9—11.

^u 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^x 2 Pet. i. 4.

^y Gen. xxviii. 15. with xxxii. 12.

^z 2 Cor. i. 20.

^a See the Greek.

^b Matt. xxiv. 35.

no refuge from the cares and fears which agitate the ungodly world! But faith in God is a perfect antidote to them all. It assures us of a God ever nigh at hand to help and succour his believing people. See how the promise in our text is introduced: it is there suggested as sufficient to counterbalance the loss of every thing, however desirable, or the apprehension of every thing, however formidable. It is suggested, in order to inspire us with a confidence which nothing can intimidate: “*We may boldly say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.*” Think of an angel sent down to sojourn here: what would either the acquisition or loss of riches affect him? or would any confederacies either of men or devils concern him? He would feel as satisfied and as secure as if he were in heaven itself. This then is the tranquillity which we also, according to the measure of our faith, are privileged to enjoy. Let us then “know in whom we have believed.” Let us “cast all our care on him who careth for us^c.” And let us so realize the promises of our God, as to know that nothing ever shall, or ever can separate us from his love^d.]

^c 1 Pet. v. 7.

^d Ps. xli. 1—3. Rom. viii. 38, 39.

MMCCCXLIV.

THE GLORY OF CHRIST.

Heb. xiii. 8. *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever^a.*

IN this present state, wherein the affairs both of individuals and of nations are liable to continual

^a This was preached on occasion of the death of the Hon. and Rev. William Bromley Cadogan, late Vicar of St. Giles', Reading, on Jan. 29, 1797. But it may well be treated as a general subject:—thus,

The creature is frail and changeable — — — But the Lord Jesus Christ is from eternity to eternity the same.

I. The immutability of Christ—

(This may be treated under the five several heads here specified.)

II. Our duty in relation to him—

1. Seek above all things the knowledge of him—

The preaching of Christ is all *our* duty, Acts iii. 20. and viii. 5. and ix. 20; and to acquire the knowledge of him is *yours*, John xvii. 3. Phil. iii. 7, 8.

2. Guard against every thing that may divert you from him—

Hold fast the instructions which have led you to Christ, ver. 7; but on no account listen to “strange doctrines” that would lead you

fluctuation, the mind needs some principle capable of supporting it under every adverse circumstance that may occur. Philosophy proffers its aid in vain: the light of unassisted reason is unable to impart any effectual relief: but revelation points to God; to God, as reconciled to us in the Son of his love: it directs our views to him who “changeth not;” and who, under all the troubles of life, invites us to rely on his paternal care. Every page of the inspired writings instructs us to say with David, “When I am in trouble I will think upon God.” Are we alarmed with tidings of a projected invasion, and apprehensive of *national* calamities? God speaks to us as to his people of old^b, “Say ye not, A confederacy, to all to whom this people shall say, A confederacy, neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid; but sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread; and he shall be to you for a sanctuary.” Are we agitated by a sense of *personal* danger? that same almighty Friend expostulates with us^c, “Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?” Are we, as in the present instance, afflicted for *the Church* of God? has God taken away the pastor, who “fed you with knowledge and understanding?” and is there reason to fear, that now, your “Shepherd being removed, the sheep may be scattered,” and “grievous wolves may enter in among you, not sparing the flock; yea, that even of your own selves some may arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them^d?” Behold!

from him, ver. 9. Whoever be taken from you, Christ remains; and you must “cleave unto him with full purpose of heart.” But beware of false teachers, such as there are and ever have been in the Church: for, whatever they may press upon you, there is nothing that deserves your attention but Christ crucified, 1 Cor. ii. 2.

3. Improve to the uttermost your interest in him—

Seek to realize every thing that is spoken of Christ, and to make him your all in all. John i. 16. Gal. ii. 20. Col. iii. 1—4.

^b Isai. viii. 12—14. ^c Isai. li. 12, 13. ^d Acts xx. 29, 30.

such was the state of the Hebrews, when this epistle was written to them : and the Apostle, studious to fortify them against the impending danger, exhorts them to remember their deceased pastors, following their faith, and considering the blessed way in which they had terminated their career. Moreover, as the most effectual means of preserving them from being “carried about with any strange doctrines,” different from what had been delivered to them, he suggests to them this thought, That Jesus Christ, who had been ever preached among them, and who was the one foundation of all their hopes, was still the same ; the same infinitely gracious, almighty, and ever-blessed Saviour. “Remember,” says he, “them which have had the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God : whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation : Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.”

These last words were chosen by your late worthy minister, as his subject on the first day of this year, and, as I am informed, were particularly recommended to you as your motto for the year ninety-seven. On this, as well as other accounts, they seem to claim peculiar attention from us : and, O that the good Spirit of God may accompany them with his blessing, while we endeavour to improve them, and to offer from them such considerations as may appear suited to you, under your present most afflictive circumstances !

Your late faithful, loving, and much beloved pastor is no more : he that was, not in profession merely, but in truth, “a guide to the blind, a light of them which were in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, and a teacher of babes ;” he that for so many years spent all his time, and found all his delight, in imparting the knowledge of salvation both to old and young ; he, I say, is taken from you ; and your loss is unspeakably severe. But is all gone ? No. He that formed him by his grace, raised him up to be a witness, and sent him to preach the Gospel to you for a season, remains the same ; he has still “the

residue of the Spirit," and can send forth ten thousand such labourers into his vineyard, whensoever it shall please him. Though the creature, on whose lips you have so often hung with profit and delight, is now no more, yet the Creator, the Redeemer, the Saviour of the world is still the same; Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever: he is the same in the dignity of his person—the extent of his power—the virtue of his sacrifice—the tenderness of his compassion—and in fidelity to his promises.

I. In the dignity of his person—

The terms "yesterday, to-day, and for ever," are expressive of a true and proper eternity: they do not import merely a long duration, but an existence that never had a beginning, nor shall ever have an end. In this view they are frequently applied to Jehovah, to distinguish him from any creature, how exalted soever he might be. When God revealed his name to Moses, that name whereby he was to be made known to the Israelites, he called himself I AM: "say to them, I AM hath sent me unto you:" and St. John expressly distinguishing the Father both from Jesus Christ, and from the Holy Spirit, calls him the person "who is, and was, and is to come." Now this august title is given repeatedly to Jesus Christ, both in the Old and New Testament. The very words of our text evidently refer to the 102d Psalm, where the psalmist, indisputably speaking of Jehovah, says, "Thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end." And lest there should be the smallest doubt to whom this character belongs, the author of this epistle quotes the words in the very first chapter^e, insists upon them as immediately applicable to the Messiah, and adduces them in proof, that Christ was infinitely superior to any created being, even "God blessed for evermore." Our Lord himself on various occasions asserted his claim to this title: to the carnal Jews, who thought him a mere creature like

^e Heb. i. 12.

themselves, he said, "Before Abraham was, I AM." And when he appeared to John in a vision, he said, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty^f." Behold then the dignity of our Lord and Saviour! "His goings forth have been from everlasting^g:" he was set up "from everlasting; from the beginning, or ever the earth was^h." We must say of him, in the words of David, "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God." And is this a matter of small importance? Does the Christian feel no interest in this truth? Yea, is it not the very foundation of all his comforts? He may be deemed a bigot for laying such a stress on the divinity of Christ: but having once tasted the bitterness, and seen the malignity of sin, he is well persuaded, that the blood of a creature could never have availed to expiate his guilt, nor could any thing less than "the righteousness of God" himself, suffice for his acceptance in the day of judgment. Know then, believer, that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever: he is the eternal and immutable Jehovah: he is worthy of all thy love, of all thy trust, of all thy confidence. Thou needest never be afraid of thinking too highly of him: when thou "honourest him as thou honourest the Father," then thou regardest him in the manner that becomes thee: when thou bowest the knee before him, and confessest him him as thy Sovereign Lord, then thou most effectually glorifiest God the Fatherⁱ. Remember then, under all the trying dispensations thou mayest meet with, and, most of all, under the bereavement which thou art now so bitterly lamenting, that he, in whom thou hast believed, is an all-sufficient Saviour; and that when thou lookest to him for any blessing whatsoever, thou mayest cry with confident assurance, "My Lord, and my God." The ministers of the Church "are not suffered to continue by reason of death." That tongue which lately was "as a tree of

^f Rev. i. 8.^g Mic. v. 2.^h Prov. viii. 23.ⁱ Phil. ii. 10, 11.

life," under the shadow of which you sat with great delight, and the fruit whereof was sweet unto your taste, now lies silent in the tomb. Our departed friend has experienced that change, which sooner or later awaits us all : he will ere long experience a still further change, when "his corruptible shall put on incorruption, and his mortal, immortality;" when his body, that now lies mouldering in the dust, shall be "raised like unto Christ's glorious body," and "shine above the sun in the firmament for ever and ever : " he is not to-day what he was yesterday : nor shall be for ever what he now is. This honour of eternal, immutable self-existence, belongs not to the highest archangel ; for though the angels may be subject to no further change, it was but yesterday that they were first created. To Christ alone belongs this honour ; and "with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

II. As Jesus Christ is eternally the same in the dignity of his person, so is he also *in the extent of his power*.

We are informed, both in the psalm from whence the text is taken, and in the first chapter of this epistle, where it is cited, that Jesus Christ was the Creator of the universe ; "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth ; and the heavens are the works of thine hands." And from the first moment of its existence he has "upheld it by the word of his power." In the days of his flesh, he still exercised the same omnipotence : "Whatsoever the Father did, that did the Son likewise." On ten thousand occasions he wrought the most stupendous miracles, and shewed that every created being was subject to his will. He not only cleansed the lepers, and caused the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk, but he raised the dead, cast out devils, and controlled the very elements, saying to the wind, Be still ; and to the waves, Be calm. Nor, in this, did he act as one that had received a delegated authority ; but as one who

had an essential, and unalienable right to exercise universal dominion. Though, as man, he acknowledged subjection to his Father, and, as mediator, spake and acted in his Father's name, yet, in all his miracles, he put forth a virtue inherent in himself; he made his own will the rule and measure of his conduct, and stamped the impression of divinity on all his actions. And is he not still the same? What he was yesterday, will he not also be to-day, and for ever? Is there any disorder of the soul or body, that he cannot heal? Are any lusts so raging, that he cannot calm them, or so inveterate, that he cannot root them out? Cannot he that formed the rude and indigested chaos into order and beauty, create our souls anew? Cannot he that said, "Let there be light, and there was light," transform our corrupted hearts into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness? Cannot he that "triumphed over all the principalities and powers" of hell, "bruise Satan under our feet also?" In short, "is there any thing too hard for him?" No, he is still the same: he, to whom "all power in heaven and in earth has been committed," still holds the reins of government, and "ordereth all things after the counsel of his own will." What comfort may not this afford you under your present affliction! It pleased him for a season to set over you a faithful pastor, by whom he has called hundreds into his fold, and "turned multitudes from the error of their ways." But though your honoured minister was the instrument, he was only an instrument; he was but "an axe in the hands of him that heweth therewith," an "earthen vessel in which was deposited the heavenly treasure," and by whom Christ communicated to you his "unsearchable riches:" "The excellency of the power was altogether Christ's." And has the power ceased, because the instrument is laid aside? "Is the Lord's ear heavy, that he cannot hear? or is his hand shortened, that he cannot save?" O remember, that though the stream is cut off, the fountain still remains; and every one of you may go to it, and

“receive out of your Redeemer’s fulness grace for grace.” Yea, who can tell? That same almighty arm that raised *him* up to be a faithful witness for the truth, that enabled him to despise the pleasures and honours of the world, and to devote himself wholly to the great work of the ministry, can do the same for his successor. You well know, that he, whose loss we bemoan, was not always that able and excellent minister that he afterwards proved. Be not then hasty, if all things be not at first agreeable to your mind: exercise meekness, patience, forbearance: seek to obtain nothing by force or faction: let the whole of your conduct be conciliating, and worthy of your Christian profession: above all, continue instant in prayer: beg that “the Lord of the harvest, who alone can send forth faithful labourers into his harvest,” will pour out in a more abundant measure his grace upon him, who by the good providence of God is about to take the charge of you; and then I do not say, that God will *at all events* grant your requests; but this I say with confidence, that your prayers shall not fall to the ground; and that, if God, on the whole, will be most glorified in that way, your petitions shall be literally fulfilled, and “the spirit of Elijah shall rest on Elisha.”

III. A third point, which it is of infinite importance to us to be acquainted with, is, that Christ is ever the same *in the virtue of his sacrifice*.

Though he was not manifested in human flesh till four thousand years had elapsed, yet his sacrifice availed for the salvation of thousands during the whole of that period. The sacrifice, which Abel offered, did not obtain those distinguished tokens of divine acceptance on account of its intrinsic worth, but because the offerer looked forward by faith to that great Sacrifice, which in the fulness of times was to be presented to God upon the cross, even to him, who, in purpose and effect, was the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” As for all other

sacrifices, they had no value whatsoever, but as they typified that "one offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." When we see the high-priest and the elders of Israel putting their hands upon the scape-goat, and transferring to him all the sins of the whole congregation of Israel, that they might be carried into the land of oblivion, then we behold the efficacy of Christ's atonement. It is not to be imagined that the blood of bulls or of goats could take away sin—no: in every instance where the conscience of a sinner was really purged from guilt, the pardon was bestowed solely through "the blood of him, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God." And is not that, which throughout all the Mosaic dispensation, and from the very beginning of the world, availed for the remission of sins, still as efficacious as ever to all who trust in it? or shall its virtue ever be diminished? Could David, after the commission of crimes, which "make the ears of every one that heareth them to tingle," cry, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow;" and may not the most abandoned sinner now hope for mercy through "the blood of sprinkling?" Could Saul, that blasphemer, that injurious and persecuting zealot, say of Christ, "He has loved me, and given himself for me?" Could he say, "I obtained mercy, that in me, the chief of sinners, Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who shall hereafter believe on him to life everlasting?" And shall any one be left to doubt whether there be hope for *him*? Surely we may still say with the same confidence that the Apostles declared it in the days of old, "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: he is the propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world: through him all that believe shall be justified from all things: the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from ALL sin." How sweetly have many of you experienced the truth of these declarations, when your dear minister has

been insisting on this favourite topic, and "Christ has been set forth crucified, as it were, before your eyes!" How many of you, while lying at Bethesda's pool, have embraced the opportunity afforded you, and plunged beneath that water to the healing of your souls! Some others perhaps among you have been long hesitating, as it were, upon the brink, and doubting and questioning your right to wash in it: ah! chide your unbelief: know that "the fountain was opened for sin, and for uncleanness." Look not then so much at the malignity of your offences, as at the infinite value of Christ's atonement: and under every fresh contracted guilt, go to the fountain, wash in it, and be clean. Let there not be a day, if possible not an hour, wherein you do not make fresh application to the blood of Jesus: go to that to cleanse you, as well from "the iniquity of your most holy things," as from the more heinous violations of God's law; thus shall "your hearts be ever sprinkled from an evil conscience," and your "conscience itself be purged from dead works to serve the living God." There are some of you indeed, it is to be feared, who have hitherto disregarded the invitations given you, and are yet ignorant of the virtue of this all-atoning sacrifice: you have unhappily remained dry and destitute of the heavenly dew, which has long fallen in rich abundance all around you. How long you may continue favoured with such invitations, God alone knows: but O that you might this day begin to seek the Lord! He that once died on Calvary, still cries to you by my voice, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else." Now then, obey his voice: say to him, "Draw me, that I may come unto thee; draw me, and I will run after thee." Thus shall you be numbered among those, who are redeemed to God by his blood, and shall join, to all eternity, with your departed minister, and all the glorified saints, in singing, "To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen."

IV. It will be a further consolation to us to reflect that Jesus Christ is the same *in the tenderness of his compassion*—

It was Christ who led the people of Israel through the wilderness, and who directed them by his servant Moses. This appears from the express declaration of St. Paul. We are told that the Israelites “tempted God in the desert, saying, Can he give bread also, and provide flesh for his people?” And St. Paul, speaking of them, says, “Neither tempt ye CHRIST, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of the destroyer^k.” Now the tender compassion which Christ exercised towards his people in the wilderness, is made a frequent subject of devout acknowledgment in the Holy Scriptures. Isaiah says, “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old^l.” Moses himself, who both experienced and witnessed his compassion, describes it in terms as beautiful as imagination can conceive. See Deut. xxxii. 9—12. “The Lord’s portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness: he led him about; he instructed him; he kept him as the apple of his eye.” Then comes the image of which I speak: but in order to enter fully into its meaning, it will be proper to observe, that the eagle, when teaching her young to fly, flutters over them, and stirs them up to imitate her; she even thrusts them out of the nest, that they may be forced to exert their powers; and if she see them in danger of falling, she flies instantly underneath them, catches them on her wings, and carries them back to their nest. In reference to this it is added, “As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead him.” Can any thing present a more beautiful

^k 1 Cor. x. 9.

^l Isai. lxiii. 9.

idea to the mind? Can any image whatever more forcibly impress us with admiring thoughts of Christ's tenderness and compassion? Such was Jesus in the days of old: and is he not the same at this day? Will he not still "carry the lambs in his bosom, and gently lead them that are with young?" Can we produce in the annals of the world one single instance, wherein he "brake the bruised reed, or quenched the smoking flax?" Has he not invariably "brought forth judgment unto victory," and "perfected his own strength in his people's weakness?" Who amongst us has ever "sought his face in vain?" With whom has he ever refused to sympathize? Will not he who wept with the sisters of the deceased Lazarus; will not he that had compassion on the multitude because they were as sheep not having a shepherd; will not he that wept over the murderous and abandoned city, now weep over a disconsolate widow, a deserted people, and especially over those, who have "not known the day of their visitation, and whose eyes have never yet seen the things belonging to their peace?" Is he become an "High-priest that cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities;" or that, notwithstanding he has been "in all points tempted like as we are, has no disposition to succour his tempted people?" Unbelief and Satan may suggest such thoughts to our minds; but who must not attest that they are false? Who is not constrained to acknowledge, that "he is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy?" Here then again let the drooping souls rejoice: ye, who are poor in this world, have lost a friend; a kind, compassionate friend, who, "according to his ability, and often beyond his ability," exerted himself to relieve your wants. Ye, who are of a broken and contrite spirit, ah! what a friend have ye lost! how would the departed saint listen to all your complaints, and answer all your arguments, and encourage you to look to Jesus for relief! what a delight was it to him to "strengthen your weak hands, and confirm your feeble knees, and to say to

your fearful hearts, Be strong, fear not, your God will come and save you!" Ye, "afflicted and tossed with tempest, and not comforted," whatever your distresses were, surely ye have lost a brother, "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." But though his benevolent heart can no more expand towards you, "has your Lord forgotten to be gracious? Has Jesus shut up his tender mercies?" No: to him you may still carry your complaints: he bids the weary and heavy-laden to come unto him: he "has received gifts," not for the indigent only, but "for the rebellious:" nor shall one of you be "sent empty away." Whom did he ever dismiss, in the days of his flesh, without granting to him the blessing he desired? So now, if ye will go unto him, he "will satiate every weary soul, and replenish every sorrowful soul:" he "will give you beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that God may be glorified."

V. The last observation we proposed to make, was that Christ is the same *in his fidelity to his promises*—

We have before shewn, that he led his people through the wilderness: he had promised to cast out all their enemies, and to give them "a land flowing with milk and honey." And behold, Joshua, at the close of a long life, and after an experience of many years, could make this appeal to all Israel: "Ye know in all your hearts^m, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." The same fidelity did Jesus manifest, whilst he sojourned upon earth: the Father had committed to him a chosen people to keep: and Jesus with his dying breath could say, "Those whom thou gavest me I have kept, and

^m Josh. xxiii. 14.

none of them is lost." He promised to his disconsolate disciples, that he would pour out his Spirit upon them ; and that the Comforter, whom he would send, should far more than compensate for the loss of his bodily presence : and how speedily did he perform his promise ! Thus, in every succeeding age, have his people found him faithful. He has "given exceeding great and precious promises" to his Church, not one jot or tittle of which have ever failed. They who have rested on his word, have never been disappointed. Enthusiasts indeed, who have put their own vain conceits in the place of his word, and have presumed to call their own feelings or fancies by the sacred appellation of a promise, have often met with disappointments ; nor can they reasonably expect any thing else : but they who rest upon the clear promises of the Gospel, and wait for the accomplishment of them to their own souls, "shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end." Let any creature upon earth "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and shall he be left wholly destitute with respect to *temporal* comforts ? No : he perhaps may be severely tried for a season ; but ere long he shall have "all needful things added unto him." Let a sinner "whose sins have been of a scarlet or crimson dye," make application to the Lord for mercy ; and shall he ever be cast out ? No, "in no wise," provided he come simply trusting in the Saviour's righteousness. Let any seek deliverance from the snares of Satan, by whom he has been led captive at his will ; and shall he be left in bondage to his lusts ? Most surely not, if he will rely on Him who has said, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, because ye are not under the law, but under grace." Now it may be, that many of you have been promising yourselves much spiritual, perhaps also some temporal, advantage, from your deceased minister : and behold ! in an instant, all your hopes are blasted : the creature, though so excellent, proves in this respect but a broken reed. But if you will look to Christ, you cannot raise your

expectations too high: he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever: you may rely on him, for body and for soul, for time and for eternity: he will be to you a "sun and a shield; he will give you both grace and glory; nor will he withhold any good thing from them that walk uprightly." If he see it necessary that for a season you should be "in heaviness through manifold temptations," he will make your trials to work for good; and "your light and momentary afflictions shall work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory:" only commit your souls to him in well-doing, and he will "keep you by his Almighty power, through faith, unto salvation."

In the IMPROVEMENT which we would make of this subject—

We beg leave once more to notice the words that immediately precede the text; "Remember them that have had the rule over you, that have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." We may appear indeed, in this, to draw your attention from Christ, and to fix it on the creature. But we shall still keep in view our main subject; and at once consult the scope of the context, the peculiarity of this occasion, and the feelings of your hearts.

First then, "Remember him who has had the rule over you, and has preached unto you the word of God." Surely I need not say much to enforce this part of the exhortation: he is deeply engraven on your hearts, nor will the remembrance of him be soon effaced from your minds. Many of you would have "even plucked out your own eyes and have given them unto him," if by so doing you could have conferred upon him any essential benefit: yea, I doubt not, there are many in this assembly that would gladly, very gladly, have laid down their lives in his stead, that so great a blessing as he was, might yet have been continued to the Church of God. It cannot be but that the poor must long remember

their generous and constant benefactor. Many of the children too, I trust, whom he so delighted to instruct, will remember him to the latest period of their lives. Above all, the people, who looked up to him as their spiritual father, to whom they owed their own souls, will bear him in remembrance. They will never forget "how holily, justly, and unblameably he behaved himself among them," and how "he exhorted and comforted and charged every one of them, as a father doth his children, that they would walk worthy of God, who hath called them unto his kingdom and glory." Deservedly will his name be revered in this place for ages; for "he was a burning and a shining light;" and had so uniformly persisted in well-doing, that he had utterly "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," and made religion respectable in the eyes of the most ungodly.

Let me proceed then in the next place to say, "Follow his faith." What his faith was, you well know. Christ was the one foundation of all his hopes. He desired "to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but that which is by the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." And as he trusted in no other for his own salvation, so he preached no other amongst you. He had "determined, like St. Paul, to know nothing amongst you but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Every discourse he preached tended immediately or remotely to glorify Christ amongst you: if he preached the law, it was that, as a schoolmaster, it might lead you to Christ: if he insisted upon obedience, it was, that you might "glorify Christ by your bodies and your spirits which are Christ's." In short, Christ was, as well in his ministrations as in the inspired writings, "the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last." Were he preaching to you at this moment, I am persuaded he would have no other theme; yea, if to the end of the world he were continued to preach unto you, you would hear of nothing but Christ, the

same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. It was this which made his ministry so acceptable unto you : it was this which God rendered useful to the conversion and consolation of multitudes amongst you. By the faith of Christ he lived, and in the faith of Christ he died. Almost the last words he uttered were these, "Weep not for me ; I am very happy, I DIE IN THE FAITH OF THE LORD JESUS." I have been anticipated in one remarkable circumstance which I had intended to mention to you ; and I am unwilling to omit it now, because there may be some here who were not present this morning. Indeed it is so applicable to my subject, and so illustrative of the character of your dear pastor, that I may well be excused if I repeat what you have already heard. That blessed man, though he possessed a very considerable share of human learning, valued no book in comparison of the Scriptures : when therefore he found his dissolution approaching, he desired his dear partner to read a portion of the word of God : she immediately read to him, first the 23d Psalm, and afterwards the 8th chapter of Proverbs. In the last verse but one of that chapter, she came to these words ; "Whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord." Immediately, without waiting for her to conclude the chapter, he cried, "Stop, stop, now shut up the book ; that is enough for me." Blessed man ! he had sweetly experienced the truth of those words ; he had found life in Christ Jesus ; he had obtained favour of the Lord ; and he knew that he was going to dwell with his Lord for ever. Such was his faith. He held fast Christ as his "wisdom, his righteousness, his sanctification, and his complete redemption." He made "Christ his all, and in all." But while he trusted in Christ alone for his justification before God, no man living ever more forcibly inculcated the necessity of good works, or, I may truly add, practised them with more delight. He was also a firm friend to the Established Church, and inculcated on all occasions submission to the constituted authorities of this kingdom. He

considered obedience to the powers that be, as an essential part of his duty to God: he looked upon earthly governors as ministers ordained of God; and inculcated obedience to them as a duty, "not merely for wrath, but also for conscience sake." As then ye have been followers of his faith and practice while living, so be ye imitators of him now that he is withdrawn from you: "be ye followers of him, as he was of Christ." And be careful, "not to be carried about with divers and strange doctrines," either in religion or politics: but "hold fast that ye have received, that no man take your crown." If there be any here, who have never yet been "partakers of the like precious faith with him," O that I might this day prevail with them to "become obedient to the faith!" My dear brethren, you will assuredly find, that the only means of holiness in life, or of peace in death, or of glory in eternity, is, the knowledge of Christ: "there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved" from sin and misery in this world, or from everlasting destruction in the world to come; no other name, I say, but the name of Jesus Christ. I must therefore entreat you now to reflect on those things, which hitherto ye have heard without effect; and I pray God, that the seed, which has lain buried in the earth, may spring up speedily, and bring forth fruit an hundred-fold.

I add now in the last place, "Consider the end of your departed minister's conversation." You have heard how peaceful and resigned he was in the prospect of death, and what an assured and glorious hope of immortality he enjoyed. "Mark the perfect man," says David, "and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace:" this you have seen verified in him. But carry your thoughts a little further: follow him within the veil: behold him united to that blessed assembly of saints and angels: see him freed from the bondage of corruption, arrayed in the unspotted robe of his Redeemer's righteousness, crowned with a royal diadem, seated on a throne of glory, tuning his golden harp, and with a voice as

loud and as melodious as any saint in heaven, singing, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb." Is there so much as one of you that can think of this, and not exclaim, "Let *me* die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Let the thought of these things, my brethren, encourage you to persevere: the conflict cannot be very long; but how glorious the triumph! Consider this, I beseech you; that you "may fight the good fight of faith, and quit yourselves like men." Go on, "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus;" and doubt not, but that you shall find the grace of Christ as sufficient for you as it has been for him; and that what Christ has been to others in former ages, he will be to you, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

MMCCCXLV.

CAUTION AGAINST FALSE DOCTRINES.

Heb. xiii. 9. *Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.*

TRUTH lieth not on the surface, but must be sought after with diligence. This is true in every science; but most of all true in religion. In all other sciences, intellectual powers only are required: in religion, there must be integrity of heart, and a sincere desire to do, as well as to know, the will of God. To other knowledge there is no obstruction from within: if only there be a sufficiency of information and of capacity to comprehend it, truth will make its way into the mind of those who seek it. But to the progress of religious truth there are many obstacles in the heart of man; many prejudices, many passions, many interests present a barrier to obstruct its entrance into the soul: and these must be in a great measure removed, before the light of truth can break through the clouds which intercept its rays. Yet in one respect is religious truth of easier attainment than any other: for to the acquisition

of it great intellectual powers are not necessary: nor is general erudition necessary. All that is wanting is, a humble, teachable spirit, that will seek instruction from God, and receive with child-like simplicity all that God has spoken in his word. Such an one, provided he seek with diligence, and with a determination of heart to fulfil the will of God as far as he can learn it, will assuredly be guided into all truth. But that very simplicity of mind which is necessary to the attainment of truth, subjects a person, if he be not much upon his guard, to be imposed upon by those, who, "by good works and fair speeches, deceive the hearts of the simple." Against such teachers St. Paul felt it necessary to caution his converts frequently^a; since, though agents only of the prince of darkness, they put on the appearance of angels of light^b. Against such he here cautions the Hebrew Christians, entreating them to bear in mind what they had been taught by those who had been over them in the Lord, and not to suffer themselves to be turned aside from the truth which they had received.

In the words here addressed to them, we see,

I. A caution given—

There were, even in the apostolic age, "many vain-talkers and deceivers, and especially amongst the circumcision, who by their subtle disputations subverted whole houses^c," and "caused the way of truth to be evil spoken of^d." In this day likewise there are not wanting teachers of a similar description, who bring forward some favourite notions of their own, "in order to draw away disciples after them^e." Against these we must at all times be on our guard, lest at any time we be "carried away,"

1. By legal doctrines—

[It was against these more particularly that the Apostle here cautioned the Hebrews. The great scope of his epistle

^a Rom. xvi. 17, 18.

^b 2 Cor. xi. 13—15.

^c Tit. i. 10, 11.

^d 2 Pet. ii. 1—3.

^e Acts xx. 29, 30.

was to shew, that the rites and ceremonies, on which the Jews laid so great a stress, were abrogated, and superseded by a better dispensation. And the strange doctrines hinted at in the text are put in immediate connexion with “meats, (such as were enjoined or prohibited under the Mosaic dispensation,) which had not profited those who had been occupied therein.” To such an extent were the ceremonies of the law insisted on by some, that they affirmed that no one could be saved without a strict observance of them^f. Thus they perverted the Gospel of Christ, by uniting with the blood of Christ another ground of dependence for our justification before God^g.

And though Judaism is not now insisted on as it then was, there is the same disposition in men to combine something of their own with faith in Christ, as a joint ground of their hope. Men are still as averse as ever to a free salvation that is all of grace. They would have it to be in some measure “of works;” not aware, that it must be wholly either of works, or of grace^h: they do not see that the very instant any works of ours are admitted as *meriting* salvation, either in whole or in part, salvation is no more of grace, and man has to all eternity a ground of boasting before Godⁱ.

Be on your guard then that you be not carried away by such legal statements as too commonly prevail even in the present enlightened age: for it is not necessary to go to Papists in order to hear such doctrines: they are still heard amongst us, notwithstanding this error formed the chief ground of our separation from the Church of Rome, and of our *protesting* against their fatal heresies. But know, that, if you add any thing to the work of Christ as a joint ground of your hope, you make void the Gospel of Christ, and must inevitably and eternally perish^k.]

2. By Antinomian doctrines—

[To these also there is a reference in the preceding context. Many converts, and especially from amongst the Gentiles, had but very imperfect views of that holiness which the Gospel enjoins. The great degree of criminality which attaches to fornication and adultery, was, through the influence of opinions imbibed in their Gentile state, but indistinctly seen: and hence, for the purpose of rectifying their views, the Apostle shews them, that, though marriage was honourable in all, having been ordained by God himself, that species of intercourse, which they were disposed to justify, was most dishonourable, and most offensive in the sight of God, “who

^f Acts xv. 1. Col. ii. 16.

^g Gal. i. 7.

^h Rom. iv. 4. and xi. 6.

ⁱ Rom. iii. 27.

^k Rom. ix. 30—33. and Gal. v. 2, 4.

would judge both whoremongers and adulterers" with the utmost severity¹. Many indeed would plead for such indulgences; as we see in the Ephesian Church: but St. Paul, warning the Ephesian converts, says, "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience^m."

Thus at this time also there are not wanting persons who teach, that the law is not a rule of life to believers; and that Christ's righteousness being perfect, they have a sanctification in him, and need not seek to have any sanctification in their own souls. From a professed zeal for the honour of Christ, they would set aside all need of personal holiness, and bring men to their heavenly inheritance without putting them to the trouble of seeking a meetness for it.

But this is an awful delusion. It is very specious indeed, because it pretends to exalt the honour of Christ: but, in reality, it greatly dishonours him, inasmuch as it makes him, not a friend of sinners, but of sin; which, if unmortified and unsubdued, would incapacitate the sinner for the enjoyment of heaven, even if he were admitted thereⁿ.

But be on your guard against this doctrine also, a doctrine foreign to the whole tenour of Scripture, from the beginning to the end; a doctrine most injurious to God's honour, directly repugnant to the great end for which Christ came into the world; (which was "to save his people from *their sins*^o;" and utterly subversive of the whole work of the Spirit in the souls of men^p. Whatever stress we may lay on the work of Christ, (and we cannot possibly rely too much or too simply upon it for our *justification* before God,) it is an unalterable truth, that "without holiness, (real, personal, universal holiness,) no man shall see the Lord^q."]]

3. By erroneous doctrines of whatever kind—

[It were endless to attempt to enumerate all the heresies which have arisen, and are yet found, in the Christian Church. Some are entirely subversive of Christianity itself, being nothing less than "a denial of the Lord who bought us^r." Others are founded upon some truth which is carried to excess, and held to the exclusion of other truths which are equally important in their place. Of this kind are the tenets of those who fiercely contend for human systems, whether Calvinistic or Arminian, taking only partial views of divine truth, and wresting every passage of Scripture which seems to

¹ ver. 4.

^m Eph. v. 5, 6. Rev. ii. 14, 20.

ⁿ Rev. xxi. 27.

^o Matt. i. 21.

^p Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27. 1 Pet. i. 2. ^q Heb. xii. 14.

^r Jude, ver. 3.

militate against their favourite scheme. The truth is, that the way of salvation, if we will only submit to be taught of God, is very plain and simple: it is all comprehended in these few words, "Faith working by love." But if, instead of taking the plain declarations of Scripture for our guide, we will refine upon them, and invent modes of speaking which are widely different from them, and insist upon our own subtilties as if they were the very word of God himself, it is no wonder that heresies arise, and divisions ensue. But against all dogmas of man's invention we should be on our guard. In order to our preservation from them, we have in our text,]

II. An antidote recommended—

We should seek to be "established with grace;" or, as that expression imports, we should be established in the Gospel; (for that is the grace to which Jewish ceremonies are opposed, and it is "the grace wherein we stand";)

1. As a revelation of grace in itself—

[It is so: it is so altogether: the whole plan, as devised by Almighty God, was formed in his eternal counsels without any reference to human merit, or to any recompence which the whole universe could ever confer. It was undertaken by the Son, purely from his own love and mercy, to die in the place of sinners, and to expiate their guilt by his own blood. The Holy Spirit also engaged to apply that redemption to God's chosen people, and to bring them to the possession of all its blessings by his sovereign and all-sufficient grace. All was the free gift of God to man: and there is not a Christian in the universe who must not say, "By the grace of God I am what I am."

Now to be established in these views is a grand preservative against error of every kind: and a man well grounded in them is incapable of being moved by all the artifices of the most subtle deceivers. Tell the man that he does not deserve the wrath of God; or that he may save himself by the merit of his works; or that, if he cannot save himself entirely, he may in part, by some good works and righteousness of his own; you may perplex him perhaps, especially if he be unaccustomed to weigh the arguments of sophists; but you can no more convince him, than you can persuade him that he is an angel, or that he is able to create a world. He has within himself the witness of the truths which he maintains; and as complete a consciousness of his need of the Gospel, and of its suitability to his necessities, as he has of his need of food for his

^s Rom. v. 2.

body, and of the suitableness of food to recruit his strength. Hence, as a security against their being beguiled by enticing words, the Apostle says to the Colossian Church, "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving^t."]

2. As a dispensation of grace to the soul—

[The same covenant, which says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sins will I remember no more," says, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts^u." It even engages to do this so effectually, that, notwithstanding all their outward temptations and inward corruptions, they shall never finally depart from God^x. In this light then should the Gospel be viewed, namely, as a provision for the "turning of men, not only from darkness unto light, but from the power of Satan unto God." For this end is "all fulness of grace treasured up in Christ," that "out of it all his people might receive," and that "the grace so conferred may be sufficient for them."

Now if once we are established in this view of the Gospel, we may bid defiance to all the sophistries that would relax our obligation to holiness. We shall see that holiness is the grand constituent of salvation, inasmuch as it is the restoration of God's image to the soul, even of that image which alone can fit us for the enjoyment of his presence, and without which we must remain everlasting objects of his utter abhorrence. Indeed, if once we are established in this grace, all the subtleties of controversialists will lose their power. We shall see that a perfect conformity to God's likeness is the only thing which we need to be concerned about; and the only end for which even the purest principles are of any value. This well fixed in the mind, our walk will be steadfast; nor, however violent the assaults of heretics may be upon us, shall any of them prevail to "carry us away."]

We are yet further called to notice,

III. The recommendation enforced—

"It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace:" yes truly, "it is a good thing:" for it brings,

1. Peace into the soul—

[Those who are tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, or who are entering deeply into controversies of any

^t Col. ii. 4, 6, 7.

^u Jer. xxxi. 33, 34. Heb. x. 16, 17.

^x Jer. xxxii. 38—41.

kind, are for the most part strangers to peace. They are distracted and disquieted, and not unfrequently "filled with envy, and strife, and railings, and evil surmisings," and all manner of unhallowed dispositions^y. Their very contentions are for the most part not so much for truth, as for victory. But the man whose heart is established with grace, dwells, as it were, in the higher regions of the air, where he is not subject to those storms and tempests which agitate our lower world. His mind is kept in perfect peace, because it is fixed, trusting in the Lord. He is content to be ignorant of things which God has not revealed; and to let people entertain different sentiments from himself on matters of doubtful disputation. He knows assuredly, that, whilst his faith in Christ is firm and operative, he cannot materially err; and that "he shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."^z]

2. Stability into the life and conversation—

[He leaves others to enter into controversies; he is concerned only about the maintenance of the divine life in his soul. Others are espousing different sentiments, and joining with different parties; and some are running the whole round of Christian profession, one day holding communion with one Church or people, and another day anathematizing them as heretics and fanatics. But the Christian who is established with grace, moves on in one even tenour, and makes his profiting daily to appear. He grows in grace, he makes visible attainments in holiness, "he runs with patience the race that is set before him." Like the sun in its course, he diffuses blessings all around him: and, having finished his course, he sets, to rise in another hemisphere, where he shall shine with undiminished lustre for ever and ever^z.]

ADDRESS—

1. Be not ignorant of the Gospel of Christ—

[It is quite a mistake to imagine, that, because there is a great diversity of sentiment upon some points, there is nothing certain: for on the points which are of fundamental importance, all true Christians are agreed. They are all agreed, that we are guilty, helpless, and undone: that it is in and through the Lord Jesus Christ alone that any human being can be saved: that we need his righteousness to justify us, and his grace to sanctify our corrupt nature: and that, whatever attainments in holiness any man may reach, he will still be indebted to the free, and sovereign, and undeserved grace of God for all from first to last. Get the knowledge, the *practical* knowledge of this; and all will be well. You may clearly see

^y 1 Tim. vi. 3—5.

^z Matt. xiii. 43.

that much human learning is not necessary for this: on the contrary, human learning, *if unsanctified*, is rather an impediment to this, especially *if it be relied upon*, as it too often is, *as a sufficient instructor, and a safe guide*^a. There is no safe guide but the Holy Spirit: and “he often reveals unto babes and sucklings the things which are hid from the wise and prudent^b.” The way to seek divine knowledge is, to study the Holy Scriptures with humility and prayer^c: and if you do so study them, you shall “be guided into all truth,” and “be made wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus.”]

2. Be not satisfied with indistinct and narrow views of it—

[There are in the Gospel “heights and depths” that can never be explored. We may not indeed have different truths brought to our view: but the same truths will be brought with ten-fold clearness and power to the soul. It is the same sun which lights us amidst the gloom of winter, and in the height of summer: but how different are the sensations it excites, and the effects it produces! Yet of these feelings and these effects the peasant is as sensible as the greatest monarch upon earth. Know ye then your privilege, every one of you, and seek the enjoyment of it: and let every one of you labour and pray, that “his light be as that of the sun, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day^d.”]

^a 1 Cor. i. 18—21.

^b Matt. xi. 25.

^c Prov. ii. 1—6.

^d Prov. iv. 18.

MMCCCXLVI.

THE CHRISTIAN'S ALTAR.

Heb. xiii. 10. *We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.*

CHRISTIANITY itself is simple; comprising two points, our fall in Adam, and our recovery by Christ. Yet it admits of an endless diversity of statement and illustration. The Mosaic institutions especially, which were intended to shadow forth the Gospel, supply an inexhaustible fund of observation for the elucidation of it. The Jews gloried in their law, and were with great difficulty brought to renounce their reliance on it for salvation. But from the law itself we borrow those very illustrations which place in the

strongest possible view the superiority of the Gospel. Their altar, for instance, was their great medium of access to, and of communion with the Deity. But the Apostle, guarding them against an undue respect to outward observances, tells them, that *we*, we Christians, have an altar far superior to theirs; "an altar, of which those who serve the tabernacle, have no right to eat."

From these words, I shall take occasion to shew,

1. The pre-eminence which we, under the Gospel dispensation, enjoy—

[The Jews had two altars; the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt-offering. It is of this latter alone that we shall have any occasion to speak at this time. On this altar they offered all their sacrifices; certain portions of which were consumed upon the altar, and the remainder was left for the subsistence of the priests^a: on which account "*they* had no inheritance in Israel, seeing that the Lord was their inheritance^b." On some occasions, particularly that of the peace-offering, the offerers themselves also partook, and had by far the larger share^c. But, when any sacrifice, the blood of which was carried within the vail, was offered, no one was suffered to eat of that: it was wholly burnt without the camp, whilst the tabernacle was standing; and without the city, when the temple was built^d: and, in order to fulfil this type, our blessed Lord, who offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, suffered *without the gates of Jerusalem*^e. Now, his blood was carried within the vail; he himself, as our High-priest, bearing it thither for us^f. Yet of his sacrifice may we all partake, provided we truly believe in him: but to those who yet serve the tabernacle, is all participation of this altar proscribed: the altar and the provision derived from it are the exclusive portion of those who believe in Christ.

Now then the question arises, "*Why* cannot those who serve the tabernacle, partake of this altar?" The answer is plain: they are conversant only with shadows, now that the substance is come; and by adhering to their ritual observances, prove to demonstration, that they do not believe in Him, who, by the sacrifice of himself, has fulfilled and abrogated them all. Even under the Jewish dispensation, the offerers derived no *spiritual* benefit from their sacrifices, any

^a Numb. xviii. 8—19. 1 Cor. ix. 13. ^b Numb. xviii. 20, 21.

^c Lev. vii. 11—21.

^d Lev. vi. 30. and xvi. 27.

^e ver. 11, 12.

^f Heb. ix. 11, 12.

further than they looked through those sacrifices to Christ. How then can they derive any benefit from Christ, whom they pertinaciously reject? Conceive, for a moment, what they who partook of the Jewish altar professed. They professed, that they were sinners, deserving of God's righteous indignation: that they desired reconciliation with their offended God (for "they must *bring their offerings with their own hands*^g): they must also "*lay their hands upon the head of their sacrifice*," to shew that they transferred their guilt to him^h. It was in the due observance of these rites that they became partakers of the altar: and if they had neglected their duty in these respects, they would have derived no benefit from the altar, or from the sacrifices that were offered upon it. Now these are the very things which are to be done by us under the New Testament dispensation. We must view the Lord Jesus Christ as the appointed Sacrifice; and bring him to the altar, and transfer our sins to his sacred head, and found all our hopes of acceptance on him alone: but this is what a Jew, who is yet resting on the observance of his legal ceremonies, can never do; and, consequently, he can never, whilst continuing in his error, partake of the benefits of the Gospel salvation. Our blessed Lord has declared this in the plainest terms: "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins."]

Seeing, then, that we Christians exclusively enjoy this high privilege, let us contemplate,

II. The duties arising from it—

In fact, this is the proper foundation of all our duties: for, though it is true that we are bound to serve God as *our Creator*, yet, under the Christian dispensation, we should receive a still higher impulse from all the wonders of redemption: "Being bought with a price, we should glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are hisⁱ." But, to speak more particularly: have we access to this altar?

1. Let us live upon that altar—

[The priests subsisted altogether on the provisions which were derived from the altar. Now we all, if we believe in Christ, are "kings and priests unto God:" there is no difference in this respect between male and female; all are "a royal priesthood;" and all are entitled equally to a full participation of the Redeemer's sacrifice: "The life which we now

^g Lev. vii. 29, 30.

^h Lev. iv. 4, 15, 24, 33.

ⁱ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

live in the flesh, we are to live altogether by faith in the Son of God, who has loved us, and given himself for us^k." There must be no depending on our works. Whilst living upon Christ, we must "shew forth our faith by our works;" but our works must proceed *from* life already received, and by strength derived from Christ. It is *from* life, and not *for* life, that all our works must be performed.]

2. Let us present all our offerings upon it—

[There was not any thing presented to God, except the first-fruits^l, without a memorial of it being burnt upon the altar. The part which was there consumed was God's share; of which *he*, as it were, *partook with the offerer*: from whence it is called "*the food of the offering* made by fire unto the Lord^m." Now, whatever we have to offer unto God, our prayers, our praises, our almsⁿ, our whole selves^o, we must lay it upon that altar. Never can it ascend up to God as a sweet savour, unless it be laid upon Christ, and ascend from him inflamed with fire that came down from heaven. "It is the altar that sanctifies our every gift^p:" and hence St. Peter gives us this plain direction; "To whom coming," that is, coming to Christ as "the living foundation-stone" of God's spiritual temple, "ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, *an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ^q*." O! let us ever remember, that neither our persons nor our services can ever be accepted of God in any other way than this.]

3. Let us invite the whole world to a participation of it—

[There is no bar to our admission to it, but unbelief. The very murderers of our Lord were invited to accept the benefits of our Lord's sacrifice. It matters not whether we have been Jews or Gentiles; if only we come to Christ, we shall find acceptance through him: for he has told us that "none shall ever be cast out who come unto God by him." Let us proclaim this to the very ends of the earth, that "from the rising of the sun, even to the going down of the same, God's name may be great among the Gentiles; that in every place incense may be offered to him, and *a pure offering^r*;" and that "all flesh may see the salvation of God^s."]

Let me now ADDRESS a few words,

1. To those who place an undue reliance on these advantages—

^k Gal. ii. 20.

ⁿ ver. 15, 16.

^q 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

^l Lev. ii. 12.

^o Rom. xii. 1.

^r Mal. i. 11.

^m Lev. iii. 11.

^p Matt. xxiii. 19.

^s Luke iii. 6.

[Many imagine, that because “they have access to God through Christ^t,” they shall, of necessity, find acceptance with God. But there must be a suitableness in the sacrifices which we offer to him. What if men had offered to God “the torn, the lame, the sick; would God have accepted it at their hands?” No: nor will he accept us, if we do not offer to him such sacrifices as he demands: they must be “*holy*, if we would have them acceptable^x.” There must be in us a penitent and contrite spirit^y: and if this be wanting, our every sacrifice will be abhorred: “He that killeth an ox, will be as if he slew a man; and he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog’s neck; and he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine’s blood^z.” Let us then examine well our motives, our principles, our manner of drawing nigh to God; that He who searcheth the heart, and to whom the inmost recesses of it are “open^a,” may approve of us as “Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile.”]

2. To those who are endeavouring to improve them aright—

[I have said that your offerings must be holy. But be ye not therefore discouraged; as though you, on account of your imperfections, could never find acceptance with God: for “God knows whereof you are made, and remembers that you are but dust:” and, as under the law, if a man were poor, and unable to bring a lamb for a trespass-offering, God permitted him to bring two turtle-doves, or two young pigeons, “*such as he could get*,” (*repeating it no less than four times*, that he might bring such as he could get^b;) yea, if for a free-will offering he condescended to accept even “leavened bread^c,” and a mutilated beast^d, say, who amongst you needs to be discouraged? Nay, I will even ask, who amongst you has sincerely, however imperfectly, offered himself up to God, and not found some token of his acceptance, and some manifestations of his love, in his own soul? Doubtless, as the Levites, when dedicating themselves to the Lord, were *first* sprinkled with the water of purifying, and then shaved their flesh, and washed their clothes, and *then* offered their sacrifice^e; so should you, as far as possible, put off the old man, and put on the new, whilst you are coming to Christ for pardon and acceptance: but, for real efficiency in holiness, this mode must be reversed: you must

^t Eph. iii. 18.

^u Mal. i. 13, 14.

^x Rom. xii. 1.

^y Ps. li. 17.

^z Isai. lxvi. 2, 3.

^a Heb. iv. 13. τετραχλισμένα. The sacrifices were not only flayed, but cut down the back-bone, to be inspected.

^b Lev. xiv. 22, 30—32.

^c Lev. vii. 13.

^d Lev. xxii. 21—23.

^e Numb. viii. 7, 8, 21.

first lay hold on his promises of mercy, and then “cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God^f.” Nevertheless, I still ask, have you not found God ever ready to hear and to accept your prayers? It is remarkable, that though a peace-offering was to be eaten on the day that it was presented, yet, if it were offered as a free-will offering in consequence of a vow, it might be feasted upon by the offerer both on that day and on the day following; though by no means on the third day^g. So I will ask, whether the savour of your religious exercises has not often abode upon your soul long after the hour in which they were presented unto God? If it continue not a third day, it is to teach you, that you are not to live upon your frames and feelings, but to be continually presenting yourselves to God afresh. Take ye then this encouragement from the Lord; and let the fire never go out upon your altar, and the altar never want a sacrifice to ascend up with an odour of a sweet smell before your God^h.]

^f 2 Cor. vii. 1. ^g Lev. vii. 15, 16. ^h Eph. v. 2.

MMCCCXLVII.

THE BURNT-SACRIFICES TYPICAL OF CHRIST.

Heb. xiii. 11—13. *The bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high-priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.*

SUCH is the proneness of men to superstition, that they need to watch with care, lest, after having once shaken off its fetters, they be again subjected to its dominion. The Hebrew Christians in particular were liable to be drawn aside from the simplicity of the Gospel: their fond attachment to the law of Moses, seconded by the subtle arguments of Judaizing teachers, exposed them to continual danger. Hence the inspired author of this epistle cautioned them against returning to their former bondage. And, lest they should be led to think, that by renouncing the law of Moses, they deprived themselves of the blessings

which were procured by their sacrifices, he tells them, that this was by no means the case; yea, that, on the contrary, they were partakers of a better altar, to which the adherents to Judaism had no access; and that the very ordinances, in which the Jews trusted, pointed out this truth in a clear and convincing manner; for not even the high-priest himself was permitted to eat of the sacrifices whose blood he had carried within the vail; whereas every true Christian was permitted to eat of that sacrifice which alone could atone for sin; and therefore, so far from there being any necessity for them to revert to Judaism in order to partake of the Jewish sacrifices, the Jews themselves must be converted to Christianity in order to obtain the full benefit even of those sacrifices which they themselves had offered^a.

To illustrate this more fully, we shall point out,

- I. The correspondence between the death of Christ, and the ordinances whereby it was prefigured—

The most minute particulars of the death of Christ were typified under the law: but we shall fix our attention at present on that only which is specified in the text.

The sacrifices on the great day of annual expiation were to be burnt without the camp—

[The sacrifices on the great day of atonement were distinguished far above all others, and accompanied with circumstances of peculiar solemnity. Their blood was carried within the vail, and sprinkled upon the mercy-seat, as the means of propitiating the incensed Deity, and of obtaining pardon for the sins committed by the whole nation through the preceding year. A part of most other sacrifices belonged to the priest who offered them: but of this not the smallest portion was to be preserved for the use of man: all, except the fat which was consumed upon the altar, was carried without the camp (in later ages, without the *city* of Jerusalem) to be destroyed by fire^b. Probably this was intended to exhibit God's indignation against sin, and to shew how utterly *they* must be consumed

^a This seems to be the true scope of the passage as connected with the context.

^b Lev. vi. 30. and xvi. 27.

by the fire of his wrath, who should not be interested in this atonement. But the words before us reflect a light on this ordinance, which it is of great importance to observe. The burning of *the whole* of these sacrifices shewed that *no legal services whatever could entitle a person to partake of them*: not even the high-priest himself, who carried their blood within the vail, had any privilege beyond the poorest and meanest of the people. *They* could obtain an interest in them *only* by faith; nor could *he* taste of them in any other way: though his services were the most sacred, and his access to God far more intimate than any other person, or even he himself at any other period, could enjoy, yet had he no more part in this atonement than every other person might have by the exercise of faith: and consequently they, who, under the Christian dispensation, should trust in the sacrifice of Christ, would participate the benefits, from which the high-priest himself should be excluded, if he rested in the outward services without looking through them to the great, the true atonement.]

Agreeably to this typical ordinance, our Lord suffered without the gate of Jerusalem—

[The death of Christ was that which the annual sacrifices typically represented. He died for sin, and, after he had offered himself upon the cross, entered into heaven itself with his own blood, there to present it before the Father on our behalf: and it was by this means that he “sanctified,” or consecrated to himself, a peculiar people, who should for ever enjoy the virtue of his atonement—— But, in order that his death might produce the full effect, it was necessary that it should be conformed in every respect to the ordinances whereby it had been prefigured: hence it was accomplished “*without the gate*” of Jerusalem; so strictly did it accord with the most minute particulars that had been before determined in the Divine counsels.

Whether there was any mystery couched under this event, we cannot absolutely determine. We should not indeed have discerned perhaps any thing particular in it, if light had not been thrown upon it by an inspired writer. But, as we are certain that this event was a completion of the pre-existing ordinance, it is not improbable that it might have some further signification. While it shews us to what a degree “Christ became a curse for us,” it may also intimate, that the virtue of his sacrifice was not to be confined to those who were within the pale of the Jewish Church, but rather to extend to those who were without it, even to the whole Gentile world.]

The exhortation, which the Apostle grounds upon these circumstances, leads us to point out,

II. The conformity which Christians also are to bear, both to the law and to him who fulfilled it—

Doubtless, every thing which Christ has done for us, entails on us an obligation to conform ourselves to his mind and will.

But the circumstances before considered, SUGGEST to us some appropriate and important duties—

1. We must renounce all legal hopes, that we may depend on Christ—

[The particular injunction to go forth to Christ without the camp, intimates, that we must turn our back upon all the legal services, and trust alone in that sacrifice which he offered without the gate. The importance of this observation would be more strongly felt by an Hebrew convert, who was assailed with arguments respecting the obligations of the Mosaic law. But it is, in reality, no less important to us: for, if we do not trust in the blood of bulls and goats, we are ever ready to substitute something in the place of Jesus, as the ground of our confidence. But services, of whatever kind, whether ceremonial or moral, must be renounced in point of dependence. They must not even be blended in any degree with the atonement of Christ, as though the performance of *them* could procure us an interest in *this*. We must be “justified by his blood,” and by that *alone*. If St. Paul himself desired to be found in Christ, *not having his own righteousness*^c, much more must we. Let us remember then what, not the Gospel only, but even the law itself, speaks to us on this subject; and let us look for a participation in the great Sacrifice, not *for*, or *by* our works, but by faith only.]

2. We must forsake all worldly lusts, that we may walk with Christ—

[What a perfect deadness to the world did Jesus manifest, when he went forth to the place of execution, giving up himself to that accursed death, from which he could have been so easily delivered! But the world had nothing that could fascinate him: its cares, its pleasures, its honours, its society, were all alike indifferent to him: He had one only wish, to fulfil his Father’s will, and finish the work he had been commissioned to perform. In turning his back on that devoted city, he felt no regret, except indeed for the blindness and hardness of the people’s hearts. Thus must we come out

^c Phil. iii. 9.

of the world which lieth in wickedness : we must be “ crucified to the world, and the world must be crucified to us^d.” “ All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,” must be abandoned as objects of indifference, as objects of abhorrence. The things that are dearest to flesh and blood, if they stand at all in competition with Christ, are to be hated and forsaken. Our former companions, if they will not travel with us in the heavenly road, are to be left behind ; for “ what communion hath light with darkness, or a believer with an unbeliever? Wherefore, saith God, come out from among them, and be separate^e.” Even father and mother, and wife and children, yea, and our own lives also, are to be of no account with us^f, if they interfere with our duty to God, or retard the execution of his commands.]

3. We must submit to all indignities, that we may resemble Christ—

[This is the principal point to which the text refers. Jesus, when carrying his cross from the city to Mount Calvary, was an object of universal execration. Thus, in a measure, must we also be, if we will be his disciples. The world will hate, revile, and persecute us, as soon as ever we become his faithful adherents. “ If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, so will they those of his household.” But we must not be deterred from our duty by these things : we must “ follow our Lord without the camp, not only bearing his reproach,” but esteeming it our riches^g, and rejoicing that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake^h. He has told us beforehand, that “ in the world we shall have tribulation,” and that, in proof of our attachment to him, we must “ take up our cross daily and follow him.” Expecting this therefore, we must “ count the cost ;” that, if we be treated “ as the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things,” we may, like him, “ endure the cross and despise the shameⁱ.” Nor should it ever seem hard to us to go in the path which he has trodden before us. On the contrary, to be conformed to him should be our highest ambition : “ for if we suffer with him for a time, we shall reign also with him^k” in glory for evermore.]

^d Gal. vi. 14.

^e 2 Cor. vi. 15, 17.

^f Luke xiv. 26.

^g Heb. xi. 26.

^h Acts v. 41.

ⁱ Heb. xii. 2.

^k 2 Tim. ii. 12.

MMCCCXLVIII.

THE CHRISTIAN'S PORTION.

Heb. xiii. 14. *Here have we no continuing city; but we seek one to come.*

ACCUSTOMED as we are to expect a future state of existence, we scarcely ever reflect on the source from which we have attained the knowledge of such a state. It was not from reason that we derived it; for the wisest philosophers of Greece and Rome could arrive at no certainty respecting it: it is "the Gospel which has brought life and immortality to light," and has thereby given us an unerring standard, by which to try every occurrence, of whatever kind. From a view of eternity, we learn neither to indulge undue complacency in what is gratifying to our feelings, nor, on the other hand, to yield to dejection under the pressure of what is painful. We learn simply to approve ourselves to God; and to look for his approbation in a future world, as a recompence for all that we can either do or suffer for him in this present life. This thought reconciled the Apostle to shame and reproach for his Redeemer's sake; for he knew that "here he had no continuing city: but he sought one to come;" and regarded the possession of that as an ample reward for all that man could inflict upon him.

The words before us will lead me to shew,

I. The transitoriness of earthly things—

We have nothing durable in this life—

[If any thing could have been expected to continue, it would have been the city of Jerusalem: because it was, beyond all others in the universe, "the city of God," and because "its foundations were like the great mountains." But that was soon to be destroyed, so that not one stone should remain upon another that should not be thrown down: and, with the city, the whole civil and religious polity of the nation should be dissolved. Thus it had been with the great empires which had successively been established in Chaldea, Persia, and Greece:

and thus, in due season, it should be with Rome also, though it was now the mistress of the world. Even this globe itself, and all which it contains, shall ere long be burnt up with fire, and utterly dissolved; so that nothing under the sun can be considered as of abiding continuance.]

This is a matter of daily experience to us all—

[We may know but little either of history or prophecy; but who does not with his own eyes behold the transitory nature of every thing around him? The seasons come, and pass away; and in like manner the generations of men vanish from the earth in quick succession. It was but the other day, and those who are now in the meridian of life were children: and in a few more days they will be swept away, to make room for others who shall hereafter arise. Since the beginning of the present year, how many have been removed into the eternal world! and before the expiration of another year, how many, who are now in health, will be taken to their long home! Truly, we are like the shadow of a cloud sweeping over the plain; and soon shall vanish, to be seen no more.]

This will account for,

II. The portion which the Christian affects—

For him a continuing city *is* prepared—

[God himself has prepared it for him: yea, God himself has built it: and its foundations are laid so deep, that nothing can ever shake them^a. To that city the Christian is already so far come, that he is entitled to all its privileges; and has, in a state of actual preparation for him, a mansion, in which he is to dwell for ever^b. In comparison of that city, all earthly edifices are unworthy of a thought. Not only are its walls and its foundations inconceivably superior to all that man can construct, but the very light that lightens it is altogether different: for, instead of needing the rays “of the sun or of the moon, the glory of God does lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof^c.”]

To this he constantly directs his steps—

[He is careful to inquire his way thither, and to prosecute his journey towards it every day he lives. Like the Patriarchs, he considers himself as a pilgrim and sojourner here: and, like them, whatever difficulties he meets with in the way, he presses forward, determining not to turn aside, or stop, till he has arrived within its gates^d. He looks to it as the rest that

^a Heb. xi. 10, 16.

^b Heb. xii. 22. with John xiv. 2, 3.

^c Rev. xxi. 10—23.

^d Heb. xi. 13—16.

remaineth for him; nor will he ever relax his labours, till he has attained it^e. In this he may be clearly distinguished from all other persons. Others are desirous of finding somewhat of a present portion: but “he seeks one to come,” and makes it the one great business of his life to secure it.]

This subject may be IMPROVED,

1. For our conviction—

[If this be practical Christianity, how little have we lived like Christians! We have been ever ready to take up our rest in this world; and for the most part have sought for nothing beyond it. The things of time and sense have had as much effect upon our minds as if they had been of lasting continuance; whilst the things of eternity have been disregarded, as though they had been altogether transient. Were it not that we see this conduct all around us, we should scarcely conceive it possible that rational beings should act so irrational a part. Let us lay it to heart, and humble ourselves before God; and “set our affections henceforth on things above, and not on things below.”]

2. For our consolation—

[We may, in the course of our pilgrimage, be oppressed with many troubles: but they are all of short continuance: whereas, the happiness which we have in prospect will abide with us for ever. This consideration makes every affliction appear light and momentary^f; more especially when we reflect that “tribulation is the way to the kingdom;” and that we are, like our blessed Lord himself, to be “made perfect through sufferings.”]

3. For our direction—

[Bear in mind the emptiness and vanity of earthly things, and learn to sit loose to them; “letting your moderation be known unto all men^g.” In the use of them, be temperate; and, in the want of them, patient and resigned^h. And set before you “the prize of your high calling,” as those did who contended in the Grecian games. Keep it ever in view; and stop not till you have fully attained it. Then shall you have the approbation of your Judge; and ere long be received into the bosom of your God.]

^e Heb. iv. 1, 11.

^g Phil. iv. 5.

^f 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

^h 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

MMCCCXLIX.

THE SACRIFICES TO BE OFFERED BY CHRISTIANS.

Heb. xiii. 15, 16. *By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good, and to communicate, forget not : for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

THE Jewish yoke was very heavy; and the observance of the Mosaic rites was burthensome in the extreme. From that we are happily delivered. Yet have we an altar upon which we are to attend, and sacrifices which we are bound to offer. Our altar indeed is very different from that of the Jews : as the Apostle has said in the preceding context; “We have an altar, of which they have no right to eat who serve the tabernacle^a.” Of their own altar they did partake; the greater part of all the sacrifices being allotted them for their support^b. But even under that dispensation, an intimation was given them, that, when the great offering, which their sacrifices typified, should be presented, they could have no part in it. The offerings which were presented by them for the expiation of sin, were burned without the camp; no part of them being appropriated to the use of the priests^c. And such is the sacrifice which was offered by our Lord Jesus Christ for the sins of the whole world, when he suffered without the gates of Jerusalem; of which therefore they who continued under that dispensation could not participate. We alone, who renounce all dependence on the works of the law, and found all our hopes on the atonement which Christ has offered, can eat of this altar, and enjoy the benefits which by his meritorious death and passion he has purchased for us. Again, though of other sacrifices the priests might eat, they might on no account eat the blood: *that* must be poured out

^a ver. 10.

^b Numb. xviii, 12, 13.

^c Lev. vi. 30. and xvi. 27.

even to the last drop^d. But of our sacrifice, we both eat the flesh and drink the blood: and it is only by so doing that we can obtain eternal life. Indeed on that body and blood we are to feed continually: it is the daily feast of our souls: as our Lord has said, "My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed^e." Having been offered by our Lord Jesus Christ himself on the altar of his Deity, (for he is at once the Altar, the Sacrifice, and the Priest,) it is accepted for us: and it is both our duty and our privilege to eat of it. But whilst we thus partake of this altar, we must ourselves offer sacrifices upon it, even "our whole selves, as living sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ^f." To present these is,

I. Our duty—

Two kinds of sacrifices we are to offer: those,

1. Of praise to God—

[Praise is most justly due to Him from all his creatures; but more especially from those who have been favoured with a revelation of his will, and with the ordinances of his grace. The Jews, dark as their dispensation was, were infinitely indebted to God for it^g. But infinitely greater are our obligations to him for the fuller manifestations of his mercy to us in Christ Jesus, and for that better covenant of which Jesus is the Surety and the Mediator — — — "We therefore should offer to our God the sacrifices of praise continually." We should do it, not only at the appointed seasons of morning and evening, which in a lax sense may be called "continually^h," but throughout the whole day: not indeed in the way of a formal service, but in the frame and habit of our mindsⁱ. This by the prophet is called "the *calves* of our lips^k," and, in our text, "the *fruit* of our lips;" because, as calves and first-fruits of the earth were offered in sacrifice under the law, so are *praises* under the Gospel dispensation. Under both dispensations, the duty of acknowledging our obligations to God, and our dependence on him, is the same: and therefore, as the Jews *confessed* both the one and the other by their offerings, so are we to do in ours, "*giving thanks* to his name^l."

But it is *by Christ* only that our offerings can come up with

^d Deut. xii. 23—25

^e John vi. 53—55.

^f Rom. xii. 1.

^g Rom. iii. 2.

^h Exod. xxix. 42.

ⁱ 1 Thess. v. 16—18.

^k Hos. xiv. 2.

^l ὁμολογούντων.

acceptance before God: for, as the Jews were not at liberty to offer sacrifice any where but upon the altar in Jerusalem^m, so neither can we present to God any sacrifice but on this altar, the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone can sanctify our gifts, and render them in any respect worthy of God's acceptanceⁿ. Of this it becomes us to have as distinct a conception as the Jews themselves had; and never for a moment to approach our God without a deep conviction upon our minds, that in Christ only can either our persons or our services be ever pleasing in the sight of our God^o.]

2. Of beneficence to man—

[This also is a duty incumbent on us. God has so ordered in his providence, that there shall always be some who shall stand in need of assistance, and others, who, as his almoners, shall be enabled to dispense the benefits which are required^p; that by a free exercise of benevolent affections there may be such a measure of equality produced, as may best subserve the interests of the whole^q. Hence, "to do good, and to communicate," is an employment in which we should be daily occupied, each of us according to our ability. The poorest, as well as the richest, should, as far as God has enabled him, find delight in this duty^r. Nor should we ever be so engaged in exercises of devotion, as to forget that we have duties to our fellow-creatures, which, in their place, are of equal importance with devotion itself. We may find it good to be on Mount Tabor: but we must not protract our stay there, when there is work to be done by us in the plains below^s. The duties of the second table must not be overlooked, any more than those of the first: nor can any measure of delight in God ever justify us in neglecting the offices of love to man. Liberality to the poor, especially when offered upon this altar, the Lord Jesus Christ, is as pleasing to God as any other offering whatever. Such was St. Paul's view of the succours which he had received from the Christians at Philippi; which he represents as "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, and well-pleasing to God^t." But this also must be offered only through the Lord Jesus Christ: if presented as *in itself* good and acceptable, it would be rejected of God with as much abhorrence as the bribe of Simon Magus was by the Apostle Peter^u. The direction given by God himself, and which must never in any case be forgotten, is this; "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed,

^m Deut. xii. 13, 14.

ⁿ John xiv. 6.

^o 1 Pet. ii. 5.

^p Deut. xv. 11.

^q 2 Cor. viii. 14, 15. with Exod. xvi. 16—18.

^r 2 Cor. viii. 2—4, 12.

^s Matt. xvii. 1—5.

^t Phil. iv. 18.

^u Acts viii. 18—20.

do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him^x.”]

But that which in one view is our duty, in another view is,

II. Our privilege—

In this view the injunction in our text is introduced: “We have an altar, of which the Jews, whilst so continuing, have no right to eat:” “*therefore*” let us enjoy our high privileges, and offer our sacrifices continually upon this altar. And truly, to offer these sacrifices is a most inestimable privilege: for,

1. We may all present them in our own person—

[*This* the Jews could not do: they must come to the priest, and put their sacrifices into his hands: and he alone could offer them upon the altar. But *we* who believe in Christ, are “a kingdom of priests:” amongst us there is “no distinction of male or female, bond or free; but we are all one in Christ Jesus^y,” “we are all kings and priests unto our God^z,” “the vail of the temple was rent in twain;” we all “have access unto God through Christ^a,” “even into the holiest of all, by that new and living way which he hath opened for us^b.”

Now let us only conceive what were the feelings of the Jews when they saw their high-priest on the day of annual expiation go within the vail into the presence of Jehovah, even to his mercy-seat, on which he dwelt in the Shechinah, the symbol of his more immediate presence: how highly privileged would they consider him! and how happy would they have accounted themselves, if that honour had been vouchsafed to them! But you, beloved, need not envy even the angels themselves: for through Christ you may go, every one of you for himself, “unto God as your exceeding joy,” and may “lay hold of him,” and commune with him, and hear his voice, and taste his love, and receive into your souls the communications of his grace and peace. It was not of himself alone, but of all the godly without exception, that St. John affirmed, “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ^c.”

Learn then, brethren, to appreciate this privilege aright: and let the thought of it encourage you to draw nigh unto your God continually, and to present to him such sacrifices as the occasion may require.]

^x Col. iii. 17.

^y Gal. iii. 28.

^z Rev. i. 6.

^a Eph. ii. 18.

^b Heb. x. 20—22.

^c 1 John i. 3.

2. We may be perfectly assured of God's acceptance of them—

[There is an excellency in our sacrifices which there was not in those which were offered by the Jewish priests: theirs were of no value at all, but as "shadows of good things to come:" *in themselves* they were "carnal ordinances," deserving of no better name than "weak and beggarly elements^d:" and, if not offered with a suitable frame of mind, they were altogether hateful to God, even as hateful as the cutting off of a dog's neck, or the offering of swine's blood^e — — — But where does God ever speak in such degrading terms of our sacrifices? "Whoso offereth me praise," says he, "glorifieth me^f;" and, "a cup of cold water offered to a disciple for his sake, shall in no wise lose its reward^g." The two are by God himself brought into a comparison thus: "Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High^h:" "to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of ramsⁱ."

Besides, the altar on which we present our offerings sanctifieth every thing that is put upon it. Leaven was expressly forbidden to be offered on the Jewish altar^k: yet in a sacrifice of thanksgiving, or of the first-fruits, it might be offered^l. So shall "the fruit of our lips," and "the first-fruits of our substance" be accepted^m, notwithstanding any imperfection with which they are offered, if only they be presented through Christ with an humble and contrite spirit: for Christ, our great High-priest, who is our altar, is also "our Advocate with the Father;" and "the incense of his prayers ascendeth with every sacrifice which we offer, and ensures the acceptance of it before Godⁿ."

Who with such an assurance as this would not wish to present his sacrifices unto God daily, and without ceasing?]

3. We all have liberty to eat of our own sacrifices—

[This liberty, in reference to some sacrifices, was conceded to the offerers under the Jewish law^o: but to us it is conceded in every offering which we can present. Do we offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving? "our mouth shall be filled as with marrow and fatness, whilst we praise our God

^d Gal. iv. 9. and Heb. vii. 9.

^e Cite at length both Isai. i. 11—14. and lxvi. 3.

^f Ps. l. 23.

^g Matt. x. 42.

^h Ps. l. 13, 14.

ⁱ 1 Sam. xv. 22.

^k Lev. ii. 11.

^l Lev. vii. 11—13. and xxiii. 17.

^m Prov. iii. 9, 10.

ⁿ Rev. viii. 3, 4.

^o Deut. xii. 5—7.

with joyful lips^p." Do we offer our mite for the relief of his indigent and distressed people? hear how he speaks of it: "If thou deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the poor that are cast out to thy house; if, when thou seest the naked, thou cover him, and hide not thyself from thine own flesh; then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee; and the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward." And again; "If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day: and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and *make fat thy bones*: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not^q." I appeal with confidence to all: When did you ever present any offering, whether of gratitude to God or love to man, upon this altar, and not feed richly on it yourselves? When did not fire descend from heaven into your soul, to testify of God's acceptance of your offering? or when did you not, after such an offering, depart, "filled and satisfied with the fatness of his house^r?" At no period did he ever dismiss you, without "satiating your weary soul, and replenishing your sorrowful soul^s." Abound then in these sacrifices, and it shall be well with you; for you shall eat of them richly both in time and eternity^t.]

ADDRESS—

1. To the poor votaries of this world—

[What a wretched and worthless altar have you! and what costly offerings are you daily presenting upon it! Your time, your talents, your very souls, are you sacrificing upon that altar! You would weep over the devotees who cast themselves under the wheels of the car of Juggernaut: why do ye not weep over yourselves, when, with all your light and knowledge, you are acting a part not less infatuated than they? Compare your state with that of the true Christian. He lives only to serve, and honour, and exalt his God: but you live only to please the world, and to gratify yourselves. He accounts nothing too great to sacrifice unto Jehovah: you will not sacrifice one lust, or interest, for him. To the world, and to self, do you devote your every hour, your every thought. And whilst you have eaten of your altar, which of course you have done, what have you done but "fed upon ashes, whilst a deceived heart hath turned you aside, so that you could not

^p Ps. lxiii. 5.

^q Isai. lviii. 7—11.

^r Ps. xxxvi. 8.

^s Jer. xxxi. 25.

^t Isai. iii. 10. 1 Tim. vi. 17—19.

deliver your soul, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand^u?" And do you suppose, that, whilst you are partaking thus of the world's altar, you can partake of the Lord's also? Assuredly not: "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils^x:" "ye cannot serve God and Mammon^y." I call you then to consider what will be the issue of a worldly life: for "if ye love the world, whatever you may imagine, the love of the Father is not in you^z." Let me entreat you then to go to your God, and to present to him that prayer of David, "Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with them that work iniquity; and *let me not eat of their dainties^a*." For be assured, that, if ye devote not yourselves to God through Christ in this world, ye can never dwell with him in the world to come.]

2. To the friends and worshippers of the Lord Jesus Christ—

[What a blessed employment is yours! A life of praise to God; and a life of love to man! What can you wish for more? What can add to your happiness, except it be an increase of grace to live more than ever unto God? Look at the angels around the throne: methinks, you have already invaded their office, and entered upon their bliss. Are they ever praising God? That is your employment day and night. Are they "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them that shall be heirs of salvation^b?" That also is your daily work, who are "doing good unto all men, and especially unto them that are of the household of faith^c." Go ye on then in this blest career: and abound daily more and more. And know that, as by the neglect of your duties "you may suffer loss in heaven^d," so by abounding in all the fruits of righteousness, ye may augment your blessedness in heaven, and obtain through Christ "an abundant entrance" into the realms of bliss^e.]

^u Isai. xliv. 20.

^y Matt. vi. 24.

^a Ps. cxli. 4.

^c Gal. vi. 10.

^e 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

^x 1 Cor. x. 21.

^z 1 John ii. 15, 16.

^b Heb. i. 14.

^d 1 Cor. iii. 15.

MMCCCL.

THE DUTY OF PEOPLE, AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF
MINISTERS.

Heb. xiii. 17. *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves : for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief : for that is unprofitable for you.*

MAN, as a social being, has duties to the society of which he is a member : and of these duties he must be reminded, no less than of those which are purely personal. The Church of Christ is one great family^a, in which, as in every other family, order must be observed, by the exercise of power in those who preside, and a submission to it amongst those who are placed under their direction. The government that shall be exercised in it is appointed by God himself ; who has invested his ministers with power to rule, and has required of their people a submission to their authority. But as, on the one hand, there has been amongst some who have presided an unscriptural usurpation of authority, very different from that which God ever committed to them ; so, on the other hand, there is amongst others a very unscriptural disregard of that authority which is legitimate, and which every minister of God is bound to exercise in that society over which he presides. For the due administration of order and good government in the Church, the Apostle, having finished his directions respecting *personal* duties, proceeds to give one, which more immediately relates to our *social* intercourse, but which is of the greatest consequence to the welfare of that family of which we are members.

In calling your attention to this apostolic precept, I shall have occasion to set before you,

I. The duty of people towards their minister—

A shepherd naturally presides over his flock : and so must a pastor of God's Church exercise rule over

^a Eph. iii. 15.

that flock which he feeds, over which the Holy Ghost himself has constituted him an overseer^b." Not that *civil* power was ever delegated by God to his ministers; that exclusively belongs to the civil magistrates^c. If the Lord Jesus Christ, when appealed to as an arbitrator in relation to *civil* rights, said, "Who made me a ruler and a divider over you^d?" much less can any claim of temporal authority belong to those who are called by him to the administration of affairs which are purely spiritual. Yet is there power given to ministers,

1. As ambassadors from God—

[August as this title is, we claim it as of right belonging to us: for though we would by no means exalt ourselves, it becomes us, and is our bounden duty, to "magnify our office^e." We come from God to you, and proclaim to you in his name the terms on which he will forgive your past rebellion, and receive you to his favour. It is in the very place of Christ that we stand, when we entreat you for his sake to be reconciled to God^f. The word which we preach to you is God's: and by you "it must be received, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God^g." If our testimony be rejected, it is not man, but God himself, that ye reject^h. Doubtless, you must judge how far the voice of the minister accords with the word of God: for it is to that extent only that you are bound to pay any attention to it: and so far are you to be from receiving the word of man implicitly and without examination, that you are required of God himself "not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits whether they be of Godⁱ;" and to "prove all things, and hold fast that only which is good^k." But when "the word which is delivered to you is that only which your minister has himself received from the Lord^l," then must you obey it as much as if it was delivered to you by God himself in an audible voice from heaven.

Now then we hesitate not to declare, that all which we preach unto you respecting your fallen state, and the necessity of your believing in Christ as the appointed Saviour of the world, and of your giving up yourselves to him "in body, soul, and spirit, to be sanctified wholly" to his service, is the very truth of God revealed in his Gospel: and whilst we

^b Acts xx. 28.^c Rom. xiii. 1—6.^d Luke xii. 13, 14.^e Rom. xi. 13.^f 2 Cor. v. 20.^g 1 Thess. ii. 13.^h Matt. x. 40, 41. 1 Thess. iv. 8. See also 1 Sam. viii. 7.ⁱ 1 John iv. 1.^k 1 Thess. v. 21.^l 1 Cor. xv. 3.

affectionately entreat, we do also authoritatively enjoin, your acceptance of it, and your submission to it: and we affirm, that, if ye reject this Gospel, ye do it at your peril, and with a certainty of incurring God's everlasting displeasure^m.]

2. As stewards over his family—

[This also is a character belonging to usⁿ, and a character with which a measure of authority is of necessity connected^o. Under that character we must, at the peril of our own souls, be faithful to you, and to our God, whose servants we are^p. Whatever we judge to be the portion most requisite for your spiritual health, that we must administer, whether it be instruction or exhortation, consolation or reproof. We must no further seek to please you, than will be for your real welfare^q: if we go beyond this, we cannot be servants of Jesus Christ^r. Of course, in the exercise of discipline, there will be some things which will be more clear, and some which will be of a more dubious character. In those which are clear, and where the word of God has precisely marked the course to be pursued, the submission of the people to the sentence of the minister should be willing and unreserved: and in those which, though not expressly defined by God, are necessary for the maintenance of order, a willing deference should be paid to the judgment of him on whom the great responsibility rests, and to whom authority has been committed by God himself for the good of the whole^s. “Not that ministers are to be lords over God's heritage^t,” or to “have dominion over the faith” of any man^u: but still, even in dubious matters, a degree of submission is due to them, that order may be observed, and the affairs of the Church be well administered, for the good of the whole^x. This is the kind of rule which a parent exercises in his family; and in a spirit of paternal love must it be exercised by ministers in the house of God^y.]

These observations will acquire additional weight, if we attend to,

II. The considerations with which this duty is enforced—

Two considerations are here urged, as motives to a cheerful acquiescence in the duty prescribed:

^m Heb. ii. 3. 1 Pet. iv. 17, 18.

ⁿ 1 Cor. iv. 1.

^o Luke xii. 42.

^p 1 Cor. iv. 2.

^q Rom. xv. 2.

^r Gal. i. 10.

^s 2 Cor. x. 8. and xiii. 10. 1 Tim. v. 17.

^t 1 Pet. v. 3.

^u 2 Cor. i. 24.

^x 1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16.

^y 1 Tim. iii. 5.

1. The return due to them—

[Ministers have taken upon themselves to seek to the uttermost the spiritual and eternal welfare of those who are committed to their care: and, when duly impressed with the importance of their office, they “watch for souls as those that must give account.” When they undertake this office, they know, that if any perish through their neglect, the blood of those who perish will be required at their hands^a. Under this fearful responsibility, “they watch for souls,” trembling lest, through their ignorance, or sloth, or cowardice, any have the truth withheld from them, or the means of salvation unprofitably dispensed to them. They feel their insufficiency^a, and are ready at times to regret that ever they made themselves answerable to so awful an extent. But a “dispensation having been committed to them, they know that a woe attends them,” if they discharge not their office with fidelity and diligence^b.

Now then I ask, Is nothing due from you to such friends and benefactors? When they, from love to your souls, and from an ardent desire to impart unto you the blessings of salvation, make “themselves your servants for Christ's sake^c,” renouncing all worldly cares, pleasures, and advantages, and consecrating all their time and talents exclusively to you, is there no love, no respect, no deference to be shewn to them? This, I am sure, is not God's judgment respecting them: for he requires, that “you esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake^d,” and if you refuse them this tribute, you are guilty of gross injustice to them, and of vile ingratitude to God, whose commission and authority they bear.

If you suppose that their living of the altar is a sufficient recompence, I must observe, that there is scarcely a faithful servant in all the Church of God who might not turn his talents to a far better account, if pecuniary emolument be the standard by which his recompence is to be estimated. As for the “shepherds who feed themselves, and not the flock,” I speak not of them: I leave them to their own fearful responsibility^e: but of faithful pastors, I affirm, that, if they could have the whole world for their hire, they would despise it all in comparison of one soul, whom they may present to God as begotten by their ministry and saved by their efforts^f. I say, then, ye are debtors to them to a great amount: if they have been your spiritual fathers, ye owe them your own souls^g: and

^a Ezek. iii. 17—21. and xxxiii. 7—9. ^a 2 Cor. ii. 16.

^b 1 Cor. x. 16, 17. ^c 2 Cor. iv. 5. ^d 1 Thess. v. 12, 13.

^e Jer. xxiii. 1, 2. Ezek. xxxiv. 1—10. Zech. xi. 17.

^f 1 Tim. iv. 16. with 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

^g Philem. ver. 19.

if they are only your instructors, yet, as watching with all tenderness and fidelity for your souls, their griefs and their joys should be the griefs and the joys of you all^h.]

2. The benefit accruing to yourselves—

[Daily do they go to God, to give up, as it were, an account of the stewardship committed to them: and this they do either with joy or grief, according as they find success or disappointment in their ministerial labours. See what grief St. Paul experienced when his people walked disorderlyⁱ: and, on the other hand, with what ecstatic joys he was filled, when they walked worthy of their high calling^k! So it is with every minister, in proportion as he approves himself faithful to his God. And how deeply are your interests involved in these exercises of your minister's soul! When he sees you disobedient to the word, and regardless of his paternal admonitions, how do his hands hang down, and his spirit sink within him! Truly, it is "with grief," and "with groanings," (as the word imports,) that he goes to his God from day to day. And the whole of his ministry, in its ardour, in its unction, in its whole character, is lowered, when he has to labour amongst a proud, a worldly, a contentious, a gainsaying people. His mouth is stopped; and, instead of finding an enlargement of mind, and a liberty of utterance towards them, he is constrained rather to speak only in tears of anguish^l, and, as it were, in the groans of one that is travelling in birth^m.

On the other hand, in what tender strains did the Apostle address those who had received his word with power, and evinced its influence by a holy and heavenly conversation! He was amongst them "as gentle as a nursing mother; and was so affectionately disposed towards them, that he was willing to impart to them, not the Gospel only, but his own soul also, because they were dear unto himⁿ." How would words, proceeding from him in such a strain, "distil as the dew," and penetrate their inmost souls! And when he felt such enlargement of heart towards them, what corresponding feelings would be generated in their souls^o! Such then are still the feelings of faithful ministers in this day. They experience either straitness, or enlargement, according as their people evince a disposition that becomes the Gospel, or a state of mind tending to obstruct its influence. And therefore, if you seek nothing but your own "profit," you should, by a loving, submissive, and obedient spirit, encourage the efforts of your minister, and impart comfort to his soul.

^h 2 Cor. ii. 3.

ⁱ 2 Cor. ii. 4.

^k 1 Thess. iii. 9, 10.

^l Phil. iii. 18.

^m Gal. iv. 19.

ⁿ 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8.

^o 2 Cor. vi. 11—13.

But it is not to the present world only that this consideration must be confined. For though it is true, that a glorified soul can feel no grief, any more than God himself can, yet, for the purpose of impressing our minds, this idea may be predicated of them, as well as of him. And O! think of the joy with which they will present to God their obedient children in the last day^p, and the grief with which they will appear as “swift witnesses” against such as were intractable and disobedient^q! Verily, their griefs will be “unprofitable indeed to you,” when the very word which they have spoken to you will be found only “a savour of death” unto you, and the means of your more aggravated condemnation^r.]

“Suffer ye then a word of EXHORTATION”—

[How long we shall stand in our present relation to each other, God alone knows: but this we know, that I must give up an account to God of my labours, as you also must of your improvement of them. O that I may be found faithful! and may you also so improve my ministry, that I may give up an account of you with joy, and not with grief! Imagine not your work done, when you have heard the word delivered to you. In reality, both your work and mine is then but just begun. We must watch for each other, and each of us for ourselves. And O! may you never have occasion for that painful reflection, “How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof, and *have not obeyed the voice of my teacher*, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me^s!” And may I so watch, and so labour, that, like the Apostle himself, I may “be pure from the blood of all men^t!”]

^p Isai. viii. 18. Phil. ii. 16.

^q Mal. iii. 5.

^r 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

^s Prov. v. 12, 13.

^t Acts xx. 26. N.B. If this were the subject of a *Visitation Sermon*, there should be a suitable Address to Ministers also.

MMCCCLI.

CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES IMPROVED IN PRAYER.

Heb. xiii. 20, 21. *Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

IN reading the epistles of St. Paul, we cannot but observe how continually he begins and ends them with prayer. At the same time, we cannot but be

struck with the extraordinary fulness and grandeur of his prayers. In truth, there is in them, for the most part, such a vast accumulation of recondite matter, that it is extremely difficult to obtain any thing like an adequate comprehension of them. His prayers in the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, are pre-eminently distinguished in this view. But that which I have now read, if not equal to the others in grandeur, is extremely interesting, on account of the richness and variety of matter contained in it. In unfolding it to your view, I shall notice,

I. His representation of the Deity, whose blessings he implores—

The very name which he here assigns to God is deserving of particular notice—

[Under the Old-Testament dispensation, Jehovah was more generally called “The Lord of Hosts:” but, under the New Testament, he is commended to us rather under the endearing character of the “God of Peace.” Between him and us a reconciliation has been effected, by the mediation of his dear Son — — — and so perfect is that reconciliation, that nothing but love is felt in his bosom towards us. In truth, every one of his attributes finds in this mystery its sublimest exercise; so that he is altogether a “God of Peace;” not having any more of adverse feeling towards us, than if mercy had been his only attribute — — —]

But what has he done to assure our souls of “peace?”

[To death and the grave had Jesus been consigned as our Surety and our Substitute. And, if he had continued in the grave, however we might believe that he had undertaken for us, we could have no assurance that his sufferings had been accepted in our behalf. But Jehovah, having “brought him again from the dead,” has given us a proof, that what the Lord Jesus has done and suffered for us, has been effectual for our complete redemption — — — Now we see, that “that great Shepherd of the sheep,” who “had laid down his life for them,” is re-invested with his office, which during his imprisonment in the grave seemed to have been suspended; and “all power is given to him,” to “save to the uttermost” all who are brought into his fold, and committed to his care. Now we know, that whatever they need for protection, for

sustenance, for healing, shall assuredly be imparted to them in the hour of need^a:" "the lambs shall be carried in his bosom; and he will gently lead them that are with young^b;" and of those entrusted to him, he will lose not so much as one^c: no power in the universe shall ever pluck them from his hands^d — — —]

In all that he has done for us, he has had respect to his own covenant-engagements—

[Here I wish you to mark distinctly the exceeding fulness of the Apostle's mind; and the vast accumulation of important truth, which, apparently without any necessity, he brings together, for the purpose of more deeply impressing our minds, and more largely unfolding to us the great mysteries of redemption. Here he traces up every thing to a covenant; a covenant made from all eternity between the Father and the Son, and in due season ratified and confirmed with the Redeemer's blood. In that covenant, the Son of God engaged to assume our nature; and in that nature, to expiate our guilt by his own obedience unto death. The Father promised to accept his vicarious sacrifice, and to give him a people who should be his joy and his glory through eternal ages. In accordance with this covenant, Christ had laid down his life: and in agreement with it, the Father had now raised him from the dead, and empowered him to perfect the work he had undertaken. What a field of mysterious information is here opened to our view! Every thing connected with our salvation is traced up to an everlasting covenant. Is God reconciled to us, and become a "God of peace?" Has he, under this character, "raised from the dead the Lord Jesus?" Has he, for the accomplishment of his gracious purposes, invested his dear Son with "the pastoral office," and committed us to him as "his sheep?" All has been effected in conformity with an everlasting covenant, and from respect to that blood by which the covenant was confirmed. And does not all this, at the same time that it opens to us the most mysterious truths, give us an assurance which nothing else could convey? Yes, verily: for if the Lord Jesus were to suffer one of his sheep to be plucked out of his hand, or the Father were to refuse to impart to us one atom of what the Saviour has purchased for us, the covenant itself would be broken. But that covenant cannot be broken: and therefore every one, who believes in Christ, may be assured, that God is to him a "God of peace;" and that the reconciliation which has been effected shall never finally be dissolved.]

^a Ezek. xxxiv. 11—16, 23, 24.

^c John xvii. 12.

^b Isai. xl. 11.

^d John x. 27—30.

Let us now mark,

II. The blessing itself which he solicited—

Here also is a singular accumulation of words to convey what might have been stated in a much shorter space. But the Apostle's mind was so full, that he could not but dilate upon the subject which so strongly engaged his thoughts. His general request was, that God would make them holy, and enable them to please Him who had so mercifully accepted them to his favour. But,

1. He first expresses the *extent* of his desire for them—

["This," says he in another place, "is my wish, even your perfection^e." He would have us "perfect in every good work." The whole soul has been so disorganized, in relation to all spiritual things, that it is incapable of rendering to God the obedience due to him. Hence he prays, that we may be "fitted^f," by a renovation and concentration of all our powers, for the execution of God's holy will. He would not have us to render any partial services, but an obedience perfect and entire. He would have us engage "in *every* good work," of whatever kind it be; without regarding either the difficulty of performing it, or the danger to which the performance of it may expose us. We should know no authority but God's; no standard but God's: his will should be both the *rule* and the *reason* of every thing that we do. And who that views God as reconciled towards him in the Son of his love would wish to curtail any one duty, or to reduce the standard which is here proposed? Sure I am, that a knowledge of God, as a "God of peace," cannot fail of engendering in us the desires here expressed by the holy Apostle, or of stimulating us to the attainment of a perfect conformity to the Divine will.]

2. He next suggests the *only means by which that desire can be accomplished*—

[It is "God who must work in us both to will and to do." Without the operation of his Holy Spirit in us, we cannot even think a good thought. Hence the Apostle prays, that God will "*work in us* that which is well-pleasing in his sight." In addition to holy principles instilled into our minds, there must be powerful energies imparted to our souls: for, as soon might a body, every joint of which was dislocated, perform the common offices of life, as we with our fallen powers

^e 2 Cor. xiii. 9.

^f καταρτίζειν.

effect the will of God in all holy obedience. We must not hope "to please God" by any thing undertaken in our own strength. Nor indeed, however it be wrought in us, can any thing come up with acceptance before God, except "through Jesus Christ." His blood must cleanse our very best actions from the defilement that attends them; and his intercession must obtain for them the favour of our God. Except as coming before him in this way, God could not look upon the very best action of the best of men: "he is of purer eyes than to behold" with complacency any service that we can render, till it has been purified and presented by Christ himself. And I wish you to notice how carefully the Apostle strives to impress this upon our minds, where a common writer would never have thought of suggesting any such idea.

You will notice, also, how full of gratitude the Apostle is to that Saviour who has thus reconciled us unto God, and procured for us the acceptance of our unworthy services. In truth, the Apostle can scarcely ever mention Christ without expatiating upon his excellencies, and offering to him some ascription of praise. Here, apparently without necessity, the Apostle adds, "To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever: Amen." And who amongst us has not his soul attuned to this divine and heavenly strain? Who, in the view of him as reconciling us to God, and as executing towards us the office of a Shepherd, and as procuring for us God's favourable acceptance both of our persons and our services; who, I say, does not add his "Amen" to this; and desire, from his inmost soul, that all "glory and dominion" may be given to Him by all his creatures, both in heaven and earth? — —]

From the whole of this subject we may LEARN,

1. What we should aspire after—

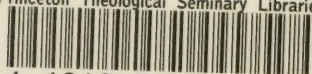
[We can scarcely conceive any thing more comprehensive of real holiness, of holiness in its utmost possible extent, than the words before us. This is what the Apostle desired in behalf of all the Christian Church: and this is what every Christian should aspire after for himself. Beloved brethren, indeed Christianity does not consist in notions of any kind. Doubtless its foundation is laid on truths revealed by Almighty God: but it must have a superstructure, a superstructure high as heaven itself; for "our conversation must be in heaven," whither our Saviour Christ is gone before. I pray you, do not attempt to lower the standard of God's requirements. Let your labour be for "every good work;" your rule, "his revealed will;" your delight, "whatsoever is pleasing in his sight:" desire nothing less than this; and aim at nothing less: but seek to be "holy as God himself is holy," and "perfect as God himself is perfect."]

2. How it is to be attained—

[It is not by any worldly principles that such holiness can be acquired: it is by a discovery and reception of evangelical truth, even by the Gospel only: and the more fully that Gospel is understood, the more influential shall we find it on our hearts and lives. It banishes servile fear: it establishes the dominion of gratitude and love: it stimulates to high and noble exertions: it renders suffering itself a ground of joy, when sustained in the cause of our adorable Lord and Master. It even assimilates us to Christ himself. What was there which he did not do to effect a reconciliation between God and us? And what will not his followers do to express their love to him? Behold St. Paul. "For the knowledge of Christ, he accounted all things but dung and dross." He was ready to die at any time, and in any manner, for the sake of Christ. In like manner will the saving knowledge of Christ operate on us also. Let this, then, be remembered by us, that Christian principle alone will lead to Christian practice. And in order to our advancement in the divine life, let us seek to know Christ: for then only shall we be conformed to his image, when we behold his glory, and the glory of God the Father shining forth in him.]

END OF VOL. XIX.

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